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# THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

VOLUME XIX NUMBER 1 NEW SERIES 1998

CONVOCATION ADDRESS  
Theological Friendships

THOMAS W. GILLESPIE

Exceptional Ambition

CLEO J. LARUE, JR.

The Missionary God and the Missionary Church

DANIEL L. MIGLIORE

Truthfulness in Church Music

MARTIN TEL

Singing a New Song: The Gospel and Jazz

WILLIAM G. CARTER

BOOK REVIEWS

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PRINCETON  
SEMINARY  
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# Theological Friendships

by THOMAS W. GILLESPIE

*Thomas W. Gillespie is President of Princeton Theological Seminary. He gave this Opening Convocation Address in Miller Chapel on September 16, 1997.*

Text: John 15:1-17

AMONG THE MANY REASONS given by the founders of Princeton Theological Seminary for its establishment was “to lay the foundation of early and lasting friendship . . . among the ministers of religion.” As the Charter and Plan states more fully:

It is to lay the foundation of early and lasting friendship, productive of confidence and mutual assistance in after life among the ministers of religion; which experience shows to be conducive not only to personal happiness, but to the perfecting of inquiries, researches and publications advantageous to religion.<sup>1</sup>

That noble goal for theological education in 1811 remains important one hundred and eighty-six years later. It may in fact be more crucial for the church now than then.

## I. FRIENDSHIP AS CENTER

It is no secret that the so-called “main line” churches in the United States are not only in decline but are also in danger of division. The national gatherings of Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Lutherans this past summer give testimony to the intense animosity that characterizes ecclesial life in what Martin Marty has called our Protestant “two-party system.” One gets the impression that our denominational structures are like old buildings that still stand only because the termites continue to hold hands. Some people would argue that friendships play that sustaining role in the churches.

One such person is Douglas Jacobson, Professor of Church History and Theology at Messiah College. His contribution to the April issue of *Interpretation*, which the editors devoted to “the recent emergence of centrist movements in Protestant Christianity,” is entitled “Re-forming a Sloppy Center by and with Grace.” One of the three marks of the new center that Jacobson envisions is friendship. As he puts it:

<sup>1</sup> “Plan of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, adopted by the General Assembly in 1811 and Amended by Subsequent General Assemblies Through the General Assembly of 1952,” in *Charter and Plan* (April, 1953), 31.

perhaps the best description of a new Protestant center is that it should be a *center of friends*. The Protestant center we envision would not be based primarily on any new churchly associations we might create or on any mega-mergers of existing denominations. What we seek are new attitudes of friendship among Protestant believers, attitudes that would then be reflected in the organizations Protestants create and maintain.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, an ecclesial center characterized by friendship would form an extensive network of personal relationships that would include people on both sides of the aisle and thus provide coherence rather than polarization.

Jacobson's understanding of friendship, however, seems somewhat shallow for the purpose he envisions. He explains:

Friendship is part convenience, part desire, part self-interest, and part care. It is an odd, eclectic mixture of attitudes and emotions that do not seem to fit together. We have friends we truly love and other friends we can hardly stand, but both kinds of people can somehow still be our friends. We become friends with people with whom we share very little, but we also become friends with people who seem almost to be our clones. We can even become friends with people who by all external measures ought to be our enemies. Friendship can exist in all these cases because friendship ultimately is an end in itself.<sup>3</sup>

Such an inclusive description occasions wonder about what the difference might be between a friend and an acquaintance or between a "tennis buddy" and someone to whom you tell the secrets of your life.

Perhaps this is why Jacobson sees friendship merely as a stepping stone toward "the real goal" of loving one another as Jesus commanded. That goal he deems "so far beyond the reach of our contemporary situation" that even to talk about it "will serve only to frustrate us into inaction." Friendship functions as "an appropriate intermediate ideal" that, if achieved, might move us one day closer to the ultimate goal of love.<sup>4</sup> This seems an odd strategy because friendship is widely viewed in the philosophical tradition as one of the several forms that love assumes in human relationships. And this understanding of friendship, I believe, strengthens rather than dilutes Jacobson's point that it must be one of the marks of an emerging center that will hold the poles of the church together.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Jacobson, "Re-forming a Sloppy Center by and with Grace," *Interpretation* 51 (1997), 168 (emphasis his).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 168-169.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

## II. A PHILOSOPHY OF FRIENDSHIP

An articulate witness to the notion of friendship in the philosophical tradition is Allan Bloom. In his last volume, *Love & Friendship*, the late University of Chicago humanities professor argued that friendship is a form of *eros*, that natural desire of human beings for intimacy with others.<sup>5</sup> While our contemporary culture can scarcely imagine human intimacy apart from its physical aspects, Bloom contends that there is in fact “a passionate, exclusive attachment that stems entirely from a supraphysical involvement of two consciousnesses.” Or, to put it otherwise, “the core of the friendship is entirely intellectual, and most human beings do not have access to it and cannot imagine it.” Here the author of *The Closing of the American Mind* is contending that friendship is the opening of one human mind to the mind of another. Of such friendship he writes:

Philosophy is what this friendship is about. The two help each other along on the path to truth. Friendship requires two souls and a reality to the understanding of which those souls are dedicated. They are solicited by the attempt to transform opinion into knowledge. It is nature, or being, or reality, prior to the souls, that provides the stuff that cements them together. That there is some kind of truth, about which they reason and about which they can agree or disagree, concerning which they can refute each other, is essential to the possibility of sharing.

Bloom acknowledges that such a relationship is rare, but he insists that it is possible. “It requires two persons who experience the urgency of the need to know, who have the intellectual gifts for knowing, who are not overpowered by other passions of body or soul, and for whom knowing is more important and more pleasant than anything else.”

What Bloom says here about philosophical friendships can be said *mutatis mutandis* about our topic. Theology is what the friendships envisioned by the founders of this Seminary are about—friendships that are “conducive not only to personal happiness, but to the perfecting of inquiries, researches and publications advantageous to religion.” It is two helping each other along on the path to the truth of God. If friendship requires, as Bloom contends, “two souls and a reality to the understanding of which those souls are dedicated,” then in a theological friendship, that reality is not “nature” or “being” but the reality of the living God who is known to us in Jesus Christ as attested in Holy Scripture and as interpreted by the confessional tradition of the church. This

<sup>5</sup> Allan Bloom, *Love & Friendship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993). The citations that follow are taken from 410, 411, 417, and 418.

God is "prior to the souls" who are involved in this kind of friendship and "cements them together" by being the truth "about which they reason and about which they can agree or disagree, concerning which they can refute each other" in the act of sharing.

### III. THE TWO SIDES OF FRIENDSHIP

In theological friendships agreement and disagreement are essential elements. Without some mutual affirmation, there would be no friendship. Without refutation, there would be no profitable friendship in the quest for truth. God's grace makes it possible for these relationships to include both. Theological friendships, therefore, are the fruit of a common interest which begins with the discovery of convictions shared. C. S. Lewis attests to this in *The Four Loves* where he views friendship arising out of a shared interest in, and common understanding of, any one of a great variety of subjects. As he puts it, "The typical expression of opening Friendship would be something like, 'What? You too? I thought I was the only one.'"<sup>6</sup>

The importance of this discovery of mutuality is not to be ignored. For it is of the essence of friendship. As Karl Barth put it long before inclusive language was in use:

My friend is *the* man who as my *fellowman* is characterized by the fact—who can explain it—that his soul and mine have come together, even though there is no blood relationship or sexual relationship between us. They have come together in the sense that to a certain degree I see myself again in him, that in him my own I encounters me with some measure of concealment, so that to some degree his existence means mine and his nonexistence would also mean mine. He is my *alter ego*, as the old phrase finely and correctly states it.<sup>7</sup>

From what Barth says here, however, it is clear that my "alter ego" in friendship is not my clone. It is only "to a certain degree" that I see myself again in my friend. My ego encounters itself only "with some measure of concealment" in him or her, so that only "to some degree" does his or her existence mean mine. Difference, in other words, is also of the essence of friendship, and in that difference there is the gift of disagreement. I call it a gift because in disagreement there is enrichment and growth.

There is a lovely illustration of this in the unexpected friendship that

<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), 96.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Barth, *Ethics*, ed. by Dietrich Braun and trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), 189 (emphasis his).



developed late in life between Karl Barth and the poet Carl Zuckmayer. In the eighty-second year of Barth's life, and in the seventy-first of Zuckmayer, the two became friends. How it began and developed is a beautiful story told in their published correspondence. Upon Barth's death on December 10, 1968, Zuckmayer wrote a memorial tribute entitled "Story of a Late Friendship" that included these lines:

For the most beautiful thing for me in our rich oral and written discussion was this, that notwithstanding a deep, basic agreement, there were always things about which we differed. He could then in a frank exchange spark his opposite number with a dark, fiery glance like a burning coal, half stern, half amused, and at the same time full of sympathy and joy.<sup>8</sup>

That is friendship—a relationship in which there is the joy of agreement and the freedom to disagree. In friendship, people can even be opponents on various issues without becoming enemies. And that is a wonderful gift, indeed.

Like yours, I imagine, my life is blessed by theological friendships of this quality. Some of these began during my own student days on this campus, just as the founders envisioned, and have continued "in after life," as the Charter and Plan puts it, signaling thereby that there is, in fact, life and friendship after seminary. Other friendships have developed along the way of ministry. One of these friends I can disagree with only about the time of day. Another I can agree with only about the time of day or so it seems sometimes. But we are friends because of our deep interest in and commitment to the truth of God in Jesus Christ.

#### IV. THE GOAL OF FRIENDSHIP

As helpful as C. S. Lewis is in identifying the basis of friendship in a "subject" of mutual interest, he is disappointing when he infers from this that friends are "naked personalities" who take no particular interest in each other's personal lives.<sup>9</sup> This cannot be the case because the theological quest for understanding is as personal as it is intellectual. It is personal because the God with whom we have to do in Jesus Christ is personal and enters into personal relationship with us. This is the God who befriends us in Christ. Montaigne believed, according to Bloom, that God is not a friend, partly because he cannot be known.<sup>10</sup> But the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel declares:

<sup>8</sup> Karl Barth and Carl Zuckmayer, *A Late Friendship: The Letters of Karl Barth and Carl Zuckmayer*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 66.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 103.

<sup>10</sup> Bloom, *Love & Friendship*, 417.

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you (15:15).

Moreover, this is a theological friendship of theological love:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love (15:9).

And precisely because it is a theological love, it is a sacrificial and redemptive love:

Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (15:13).

Theological friends abide in this love and that makes friendship deeply personal as well as intellectual. Theological friends care about each other's lives.

Caroline J. Simon, who teaches philosophy at Hope College, discusses the nature of friendship's mutual caring in her new book, *The Disciplined Heart*.<sup>11</sup> Her thesis is that friendship entails discerning, endorsing, and encouraging the *destiny* of a friend. Simon devotes several pages to the use of destiny as a technical term, but the bottom line is that "a person's true story" is a destiny. Quoting with approval political philosopher Glenn Tinder's explicitly Christian definition of destiny, she explains:

"My destiny is my own selfhood, given by God, but given not as an established reality, like a rock or a hill, but as a task lying under a divine imperative." Destiny is unlike fate in that a destiny can be failed or refused; it is what God intends, but does not compel.

A friend is someone, therefore, who intuitively senses my sense of self, who endorses my "true story." A Christian friend is one who perceives my destiny in relation to the God we both serve and encourages me to become the person in Christ that God has made possible for me by creation and redemption. In Simon's words:

Friendship commits itself to helping a person attain her vision of herself. If the judgment that the friend's self-concept approximates her destiny is true, it must be based on insight into her destiny; true friendship thus involves imagination. Moreover, friendship entails not only endorsing the friend's self-concept, but also caring deeply enough about her achieving her destiny to go out of one's way to help.

<sup>11</sup> Caroline J. Simon, *The Disciplined Heart: Love, Destiny, and Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). The citations that follow are taken from 16, 19, and 90-91.



As an example of what such friendship might look like, Simon cites a passage from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. It is the scene in which Nick Carraway, Gatsby's neighbor, recalls their first encounter at one of Gatsby's extravagant parties when Nick was unaware that he was talking to his host. In retrospect he recalls that Gatsby

smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced—or seemed to face—the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on *you* with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey.<sup>12</sup>

Theological friendship is of that same quality. Friends are for one another. Friends understand one another to the extent each wishes to be understood. Friends believe in each other, not because of their respective achievements but out of respect for their individual destinies before God. Friends support each other in the pursuit of their “true stories.”

#### V. FRIENDS: LIKE AND UNLIKE

We began with Douglas Jacobson's vision of an emerging new ecclesial centrism characterized, at least in part, by friendship. His version of friendship represented an achievable halfway house for church members who cannot deal with Christ's command that we, his disciples, love one another. Friendship of the kind we have been considering, however, is clearly no stepping stone to love. In friendship we are already there—love in the form of friendship, love as friendship. Jacobson is aware, however, that friendship by any definition tends to be idealistic. But friendship is capable also of realism. He writes:

It understands limitations. One cannot be friends with everyone. Friendship takes time and there are only so many hours in each day. We do not expect to be friends with everyone, nor do we expect everyone to be friends with us. Yet we know that our circle of friends overlaps with the friendship circles of each of our individual friends, and those circles continue to extend outward literally around the globe.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Simon, *The Disciplined Heart*, 91.

<sup>13</sup> Jacobson, “Re-forming a Sloppy Center,” 169.

Whether the network of friendships envisioned here would be able to create a new center in Protestant churches that will hold together polarized parties, I do not pretend to know. But I do know that we need friends of all kinds and that ministers as well as professors need theological friends of the kind we have considered. In fact, I will be so bold as to suggest that we need at least two such friends, one who is very much like ourselves and another who is anything but like us.

Some four decades ago, on a Sunday morning, I was listening to the National Radio Pulpit. It must have been during the summer because the preacher was a guest of the program, a Baptist pastor from St. Louis. I cannot recall his name, but I have not forgotten his sermon. The theme was brotherhood, and he spoke personally of his two brothers. One he described as the brother most like himself. They agreed on virtually everything important—religion, politics, and ethics. And, of course, they spent much time together as they grew up in their parents' home and even afterward. The other brother was designated as the one least like this pastor. They did not see eye-to-eye on theology or politics or business or anything. And, of course, they were not close in growing up or in adulthood.

Then during the years of the Great Depression, when this now successful minister was a struggling young pastor in upstate New York with a new wife and a first-born child, he was unable to pay for enough coal to heat their home in the dead of winter. It was at that point that a letter arrived from the brother least like himself with a check for one-hundred dollars. The accompanying note merely said, "I thought you might be able to use this." The pastor's retrospective comment on this act of generosity was this, "There is nothing quite like a hundred dollars worth of brotherhood."

I believe that the word brotherhood in that comment can be translated as friendship. There is nothing like a needed act of friendship, even when it is done, no, make that *especially* when it is done for us by the friend who is least like ourselves.

To entering students, as well as those who are returning, I earnestly urge you to include in your theological education the development of theological friendships that will last a lifetime. You will never again be in a place where there are so many people who care about the same things as you. Take advantage of this marvelous opportunity to form friendships among those who are like you and those who are not like you. And what I urge upon students, I urge equally upon faculty and administrative colleagues. We all need those friends who, like our Lord Jesus Christ, will never let us down, never let us off, and never let us go.

# Exceptional Ambition

by CLEO J. LARUE, JR.

*Cleo J. LaRue, Jr. is Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary. He preached this sermon at the Opening Communion Service in Miller Chapel on September 17, 1997.*

Texts: Isaiah 53:1–6

Matthew 20:17–28

IN THE GOSPEL text before us today, immediately on the heels of the Lord's announcement of his Passion, the mother of two preachers approaches Jesus with a bold and brash request. "Declare," she said, "that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." This mother well understood the social and political protocol of her day, for at table and in other formal situations the most important person was in the center, the next most important was at the right, and the third most important was at the left. In her request, she is asking Jesus to grant her two sons what she believes to be the highest places of honor and authority in his kingdom—seats on his right and on his left.

We should not think too harshly of this mother for asking such a favor. Most parents want to see their daughters and sons do well in ministry—once they accept the fact that they are in ministry in the first place! And preachers have never been shy about using apron strings or coattails to gain an advantage in ministry. But from Jesus' reply it is clear that he understood that while the request came through the mother it actually came from the sons. Mark's Gospel doesn't even bother with the niceties of a mother's request; it simply puts the plea in the mouths of James and John (10:35).

The ten, upon hearing this ambitious request, were filled with indignation, but their anger and angst did not stem from shocked modesty or outraged humility, but plain old preacher jealousy. For the ten who heard this mother's plea for primacy and privilege were no more free of ambition than the two on whose behalf the request was made. Thus, when Jesus prepared to set their thinking straight about greatness in the kingdom, he addressed his comments not merely to the two sons of Zebedee, but to all desperately ambitious "wannabees" everywhere and in every place.

To them, and to us, Jesus says, "You know that the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave." Without equivocation, Jesus lets it be known that in the kingdom of God greatness lies

not in dominance but in service. The title "great" is reserved not for office-happy gavel-grabbers jockeying for powerful positions and telling titles, but rather for those who spend themselves freely and gladly in the service of others. Amen.

That's a good sermon, and I guess we could stop right here. But there is more going on in this text than simply the proper understanding of what it takes to be great in the kingdom. And the "more" going on in this text comes to our attention through Matthew's characteristic use of the word "then." At the outset of this text, Jesus announces for the third time that betrayal, mockery, torture, death, and ultimately resurrection await him in Jerusalem. *Then*, on the heels of this sober announcement, the mother of the sons of Zebedee comes to him with this request for her sons to be first in the future.

Eduard Schweizer is right when he says that by means of his characteristic "then," Matthew links more closely the Lord's humiliating Passion with the disciples' plea for power and position. When the Lord's announcement of his Passion stands in juxtaposition to the disciples' desire for primacy and privilege it becomes all too evident that there is more going on in this text than helpful hints to impatient clerics or moral instruction to misguided ministers. This is no episodic "then." This is no in the meantime "then." This is no and-continuing-on-with-the-story "then." Contextually, this is a *then* "then." For with his use of the word "then" Matthew has linked together two vastly different ways of responding to God's will. Immediately after an announcement that indicates that Jesus has wholly and completely submitted himself to God's will, even to the point of death, there comes this ill-timed, inconsiderate, self-serving request for positions of prominence and authority. On one side of the *then* is Jesus and his absolute obedience to God's will and on the other side of the *then* are the disciples who have yet to discern and embrace God's will.

On the face of it, this is indeed a story about true greatness coming only through service, but in terms of what this text is doing, Matthew wants us to understand that the paradoxical nature of greatness in the kingdom can only be accepted by those who have wholly and completely discerned and embraced God's will and God's way. The petty jealousies and personal ambitions that racked the disciples indicated that they had yet to understand or embrace God's will for them or for Jesus. Their earnest striving and aim for eminence was born of natural ambition. The kind that afflicts so many of us. The kind that so often distracts and deters us from fully embracing God's call and claim upon our lives. Here on the eve of the Lord's agony, the disciples were

concerned about positions of prominence and authority when the real challenge before them was the discerning and doing of God's will.

Let there be no doubt, the issue is, in fact, a struggle to discern God's will. And we know that it is hard to discern God's will. This is the reason we are so prone to trail off into trivialities and to major in minor things. One reason it is so hard to discern God's will is that God's will often comes to us through paradox, that is, it comes to us through that which is seemingly contradictory and yet is true. It comes to us through that which is seemingly opposed, even antithetical, to common sense, and yet is true.

Throughout the Scripture, God's will is manifested time and time again through paradox. If you want to live, you must be willing to die; if you want to have you must give away; how you come up depends on where you fall; if you want to be great you must be a servant, and if you want to be first you must be a slave. God's will is often revealed to us through paradox.

Some of you who hear me this morning are fresh from struggles with the paradoxical nature of God's will. I hear it. I hear it even now: Going where? To do what? God is calling you to do what? Princeton? I thought you were through with school? Never mind Princeton, where is New Jersey? Or consider what is happening right here before us today. Here you are at Princeton Seminary, this great repository of the Reformed tradition in America. Here you are at Princeton, this flagship institution of the Presbyterian Church (USA). And here on the opening day of school the first sermon you hear is from a black Baptist preacher.

God's will is often revealed to us through paradox. And yet we must be open to the paradoxical nature of the manifestation for in it can be found the saving presence of God and God's rule. In it can be found the good news of the redemptive purposes of Almighty God. In that manifestation can be found the unique religious joy that indicates that the eschatological age of salvation is upon us.

We, like the disciples, are slow in discerning God's will for often it comes to us through paradox. Then again, it is also hard to discern God's will because only seldom do we have the courage, the wherewithal to embrace it directly—head on. Seldom do we go straight to God's will. And to be honest with you, I am afraid of those who know it too quickly—those who are too firm in the rightness of their understanding of it. Most of those who have gone on to meaningful service have struggled in discerning and doing God's will—Jacob at the Jabbok river, Elijah under a Juniper tree, Paul on a street called Straight, Martin Luther King, Jr. at the kitchen table over a late night pot of coffee where he finally decided that no gun would be found in his home. Most who



have gone on to meaningful service have struggled in discerning and doing God's will. Seldom do we embrace it by way of a straight line.

For most of us the circumstances under which we discern and do God's will are more akin to the Jericho road than the king's highway. The king's highway is a well-marked, frequently traveled path, while the Jericho road is a contorted, circuitous route steeped in danger and filled with unforeseeable delay. The Jericho road is the road most of us travel on our way to embracing God's will.

For some it is a straight line, but for most of us it is a meandering journey, where hindsight, more often than not, has the upper hand. Some of us are here because we are sure it is God's will, while others of us are here because we are seeking God's will. Some are here because doors have clearly been opened, while others are here because some doors have apparently been closed. Some are here because seminary was their first choice, while others are here because by God's grace they have been given a second chance.

We are slow to discern God's will for often it comes to us through paradox and seldom are we able to embrace it directly. What is God's will for you? How shall God achieve God's purpose in your life? I do not know. Your life's work may be in the academy, the church, or the world, or some combination of the three. I do not know. It might find you ministering to the homeless or comforting those who are wasting away from the ravages of AIDS. I do not know. Your ministry might find you on an avenue or in an alley, on a hill or in a hole, under a tall steeple, or at the wrong end of a dictator's stick. I do not know.

Your work could be in suburban strongholds, or it could be amid the blight of the inner city, or even in the still further reaches of some foreign mission field. I do not know. But this I do know, God's will furthers God's redemptive purposes. God's will is often manifested through paradox. And seldom do we have the courage and wherewithal to embrace it directly.

Therefore, what we need is exceptional ambition. Exceptional ambition aspires to serve God faithfully and fully as possible, according to God's will. Exceptional ambition is the desire to be of great usefulness to God, according to God's will. In the black church we sing a song that says:

I'll say yes, Lord, yes, to your will and to your way  
I'll say yes, Lord, yes, I will trust you and obey  
When your Spirit speaks to me, with my whole heart I'll agree  
and my answer will be yes, Lord, yes!

If we need an example of the redemptive power of absolute obedience to

God's will, we have only to look unto Jesus, for in obedience to God's will his selfless service became the source of our salvation. In obedience to God's will, he took a birthday in time and was born of suspect parentage, in a third-rate country, in a forgotten corner of the world. In obedience to God, he gave up his rightful seat in that celestial city that was older than Eden and taller than Rome. In obedience to God, he traded in the praises of angels for the sin-stricken curses of lost humanity; he traded in a crown for a cross and a throne for a tomb. In obedience to God, Jesus the judge was judged in our place. He who knew no sin became sin for us and died a despicable death on a blood-stained hill just outside of Jerusalem.

But because of his faithful obedience, God raised him from the dead, and has highly exalted him, and has given him the name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

On this first glad-morning of undiluted hopes and joyful expectations, what kind of ambition do you possess?

# The Missionary God and the Missionary Church

by DANIEL L. MIGLIORE

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**W**HAT IS THE mission of the church in the world today? On the eve of the third millennium A.D., this is a timely and challenging question for the Presbyterian Church and indeed for all Christian churches.

In one sense, of course, the mission of the church remains what it has always been: worship, witness, life, and service in response to the good news of Jesus Christ crucified and risen for the salvation of the world. At the same time, it is clear that the context in which Christian mission occurs today is different from that of earlier centuries or even from the mid-twentieth century. The end of the Cold War, the new global economy, and the resurgence of ethnic, cultural, racial, and religious conflicts are some of the markers of the new context for Christian witness and mission. So, too, are the worldwide women's movement, the ecological crisis, and the widening gap between rich and poor. There is growing agreement that we are in a time of epochal transition and that we stand on the boundary between the modern world shaped by the assumptions and ideals of the Enlightenment and an emerging postmodern world.

In this complex and often bewildering situation, where do we get our theological bearings for dealing with the question of the mission of the church today? Much of what we hear and read about the church is often disappointing because it lacks an explicitly theological dimension. We are overwhelmed with statistical reports, historical surveys, sociological analyses, and church growth proposals. There is no doubt that responsible ecclesiology will need to take such studies into account. Yet the primary task for Christian reflection about the nature and mission of the church, now as ever, is theological.

In what follows, I will contend that the nature and mission of the church are grounded in the nature and missionary activity of the triune God.<sup>1</sup> The mission of the church is to participate in the reconciling love of the triune God who reaches out to a fallen world in Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit brings strangers and enemies into God's new and abiding

<sup>1</sup> For two influential statements of this theme, see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), and Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: Sketches for a Missionary Theology* (London: SPCK, 1978).



community. I believe that such a trinitarian understanding of Christian mission is not only faithful to the biblical witness but also directly addresses what may well be the most urgent spiritual and social need of our time, namely the discovery of our full humanity in the experience of a new community made up of former strangers and enemies.<sup>2</sup>

#### I. FOUR HINDRANCES TO CHRISTIAN MISSION

Before developing this thesis further, I want first to identify four ways in which the understanding of the church within modern American Protestantism has been seriously weakened in its ability to address the contemporary challenges facing Christian mission.

First, the understanding of the church and its mission has been damaged by the *individualism* of the modern era. Individualism corrodes deep and lasting community. For the individualist, participation in the life of a group or society is strictly utilitarian and provisional. The individual agrees to join and to remain a member of a group so long as it serves the individual's purposes. The self of the individual is thought to be complete in itself and has no essential need of others. This individualistic view of human life seems singularly out of touch with an age that yearns for genuine community and is increasingly aware of the connectedness of life. Moreover, modern individualism is utterly at odds with the biblical witness. According to scripture, God has created humanity in and for community. The salvation or fullness of life intended by God is inseparable from life-in-communion with God and others.

Second, the understanding of the church and its mission has been damaged by *secularization*. By the secularization of the church I mean its accommodation to secular models of society, whether corporation, club, support group, or political party. The best way of defining the secularization of the church is to say it is what happens when the church allows its life and mission to be defined by something other than the gospel of Jesus Christ. We secularize the church when we reduce it to a means to accomplish our own personal ends or those of a special interest group. These ends may be good and worthy in themselves, but if they are ends determined by our own interests and ideologies—whether they be located on the right, on the left, or in the middle—they necessarily lead to the secularization of the church. Whereas individualism damages the church by privatizing our relationship to God, secularization damages the church by making it simply a vehicle for the accomplishment of our own goals and purposes.

<sup>2</sup> See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

Third, long dominant understandings of the church and its mission have been rightly criticized for their bondage to the assumptions of patriarchal western culture. The church has been called to repent of its *complicity in patterns of exclusion, injustice, and oppression both in its own life and in its mission to the world*. Regrettably, the church has all too often only mirrored the values and practices of the surrounding world rather than challenging and seeking to transform them. In recent decades criticisms of the church have been made with special force by third-world Christians, by Christians of minority groups in North America, and by feminist and womanist theologians. Long silent, these prophetic voices have challenged the church to repent of the spirit of western superiority, racism, and patriarchy that have permeated so much of the history, theology, organization, and mission of the church.

Fourth, and underlying the three previously mentioned factors, the understanding of the church and its mission has been seriously weakened by the *loss of a compelling theological vision*. The church is vulnerable to the acids of individualism and secularization and is confused and defensive about the criticisms leveled against it because it is suffering from a loss of theological clarity. It has come perilously close to losing hold of the core, identifying convictions and commitments of Christian faith, the convictions and commitments that make the church to be the church and distinguish it from countless special interest groups, social clubs, political parties, and civic organizations. The cost of the loss of theological vision is especially high at a time when there is increasing awareness of cultural and religious pluralism and when all communities of faith confront the threat of relativism.

In truth, the church simply has no clear identity and mission apart from what is given to it by the God who has called it into being and who sustains it by God's own powerful word. How can we possibly understand what it means to call the church the "people of God" if there is no agreement about who God is and what God's purposes are? How can we speak meaningfully of the church as the "body of Christ" if we are uncertain about who Christ is and what his saving work is all about? How can we talk of the church as the community renewed, empowered, and guided by the Holy Spirit if we do not have a clue as to who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit is up to in the world? In brief, a Christian understanding of the church is shaped and oriented by the revelation of the identity, activity, and purpose of the triune God.

In our search for a clearer vision of the church's nature and mission, we can learn from the sixteenth-century Reformers. For the Reformers, the recovery of the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ as attested in scripture was central

to the church's reform. They trusted that the needed reform and renewal of the church would follow upon this recovery as thunder follows lightning. The ecclesiology of the Reformers focused on three great principles: (1) that the church is identified by the proclamation of the gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments; (2) that the church is grounded in the electing grace of God and not in any merits or works of its own; and, (3) that the church must again and again be reformed according to the word of God. Reformation and renewal are not something accomplished once and for all in the life of the church, but are a continuing need and responsibility of the church in every age.

While our Reformation heritage is of abiding significance, the vision of the mission of the church that is needed today will not be a mere repetition of the ecclesiology of the Reformers. The issues we face today are not the same as those the Reformers faced and, equally important, the Reformers were not especially strong on the theme of mission. I think Karl Barth is correct in criticizing the Reformers on this last point. Their doctrine of the church is deficient not in what it affirmed but in failing to work out an adequate theology of the mission of the church on the basis of these affirmations.<sup>3</sup> A sketch of a missionary theology for our time is the task to which we now turn.

## II. MISSIONARY THEOLOGY: SEVEN THESES

The primary mission of the church is to participate in the missionary activity of the triune God in the world. That is the central point I want to develop in the following seven theses.

1. *The nature and mission of the church are grounded in the nature and mission of the triune God.* This thesis differs significantly from other ways of speaking about the mission of the church. Sometimes the mission of the church has been understood as the effort to save people from eternal damnation; sometimes to expand the power and influence of the church; sometimes to share the blessings of western culture with people of other cultures; sometimes to transform the world into the reign of God. Such rationales for mission are all inadequate. Even reference to the great commission of our Lord in Matthew 28:19-20 should not be taken as a convenient proof-text that substitutes for a comprehensive theology of the church and its mission. Ecclesiology and missiology must draw deeply from the well of the biblical witness.

The church is a missionary community because God is a missionary God.

<sup>3</sup> See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962), IV/3.2: 766ff.

The triune God who lives eternally in mutual self-giving love wills to include creatures in that community of love. The welcoming of the other that marks the life of the Trinity in all eternity is extended outward to us. Through the divine missions of Word and Spirit, God welcomes creatures to share the triune life of love and community. In the mission of Jesus Christ God forgives sinners and opens the way to their reconciliation with God and others, and in the mission of the Holy Spirit God empowers our participation in the triune God's life of outgoing, self-giving love to others. The mission of the church has its basis and model in this reaching out to the world by God, this *missio Dei* or divine missionary activity.<sup>4</sup> The reconciling mission of the incarnate Word and the transforming mission of the Spirit identify the God of Christian faith as a missionary God. A proper understanding of the church and its mission begins with this recognition: that the triune God initiates mission and the church is called to participate in that mission. As David Bosch writes, "To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love."<sup>5</sup>

2. *The missionary activity of the church is a participation in the mission of Jesus Christ. In the Reformed theological tradition the doctrine of the threefold office of Christ gives direction to the Reformed understanding of the mission of the church.* Our participation in the mission of God finds its center in the ministry, passion, and resurrection of Christ. The community called the church looks to the incarnate, crucified, and risen Christ as the foundation and guide of every aspect of Christian life, including the call to mission.

In the Reformed theological tradition, the saving work of Christ has often been described in terms of his threefold office as priest, prophet, and king. As priest, Jesus Christ is our mediator, the one who in his ministry, cross, and resurrection brings God's forgiveness and new life to the world and renders to God the obedience that is God's due. As prophet, Jesus Christ instructs and guides us in the will of God and exposes the idolatry, injustice, and violence that rule both our personal lives and our life in society. As king, Jesus Christ protects and defends the church from conquest by the forces of evil in the world and claims our obedience in all areas of life.

The doctrine of the threefold office of Christ brings clarity and direction to our understanding of the church and its mission. This cannot possibly mean, of course, that the church replaces Christ as the primary missionary or that the church completes the mission that Christ left only partially accomplished.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief history of the concept of mission as *missio Dei*, see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 389-393.

<sup>5</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.



On the contrary, the living Christ continues his missionary work, and the church is called to participate in that work. Hence the church's mission will always include the priestly activity of proclaiming forgiveness and reconciliation in the name of Christ; it will always include the prophetic activity of teaching God's will made known in Jesus Christ and unmasking the powers and principalities of this world that oppose God's will; and it will always include the royal activity of being a protector and advocate of the weak and lowly and using what power and influence it has not for its own sake but for the sake of God's coming reign of justice and peace which has dawned in power in the royal life, death, and resurrection of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

3. *If it is Christ-centered, the missionary activity of the church will be wholistic as was Christ's own; Christian mission addresses both the spiritual and the physical needs of human beings.* The Word became flesh in Jesus Christ. The mission of God in Christ did not involve merely the sending forth of an idea or simply the depositing of words in a book. In Jesus Christ the Word of God entered deeply into the flesh, into the totality of the human condition. Any understanding of the nature and mission of the church that fails to do justice to this fleshiness of the person and work of Christ becomes docetic. The ministry of Jesus the Word incarnate was a ministry of wholistic renewal and transformation; it included healing and forgiveness for the whole person. It brought new life and hope to soul and body. It challenged the patterns and structures of public life as well as the lives of individuals.

If we see the missionary activity of God centered in Christ the incarnate Lord, we will understand our own mission as an incarnational mission. We will understand who we are and what we are called to do wholistically and will not allow our understanding of church and mission to be driven by pernicious dualisms. Among these dualisms are the views that the mission of the church is directed toward the salvation of souls *or* toward the care of the hungry and the homeless; that the mission of the church is concerned about the well-being of humanity *or* about the well-being of nature; that the mission of the church is to worship God *or* to be an advocate for justice and peace in our homes, our communities, and our world. Worship and mission belong together. In the act of worship the people of God make clear whether they understand themselves as a missionary community, and in the act of mission the people of God make clear whether they are grounded in the worship of the triune God. The way the gospel is proclaimed, the sacraments are celebrated, the prayers are

<sup>6</sup> See Philip W. Butin, *Reformed Ecclesiology: Trinitarian Grace According to Calvin*, Studies in Reformed Theology and History 2:1 (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1994), and Geoffrey Wainwright, *For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 99-186.

offered, and the church fellowship is realized either extends or withholds hospitality to people in the surrounding community. Our liturgy and prayer serve either to welcome or inhibit solidarity with people everywhere who are in need in body or spirit.<sup>7</sup>

4. *If it is Christ-centered, the missionary activity of the church will follow the way of the cross and will show a partiality to outsiders, strangers, and all those considered alien and disturbingly different.* There is a scandal about this feature of Christian community and mission but it is the ineradicable scandal of the biblical witness as a whole and of the gospel message in particular. The divine partiality to the weak, the neglected, and the excluded is deeply embedded in the witness of the Old and New Testaments. We may think of the many Old Testament passages that express God's concern for the strangers, aliens, and immigrants in the land, and of God's commands to support and care for widows, orphans, and other vulnerable people:

You shall not deprive the alien or the orphan of justice. . . . When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. . . . Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this (Deut. 24:17, 19, 22).

It is of a piece with such Old Testament descriptions of the partisanship of God that Jesus Christ has table fellowship with sinners and despised tax collectors, befriends women and others marginalized in society, heals lepers and demoniacs, tells parables about good Samaritans and about women and men whose activity points to some feature of the reign of God, and finally is crucified between two criminals, promising one of them a place in paradise. Douglas John Hall rightly emphasizes that the "logic of the cross" has to be applied to Christian mission as well as to other aspects of Christian existence.<sup>8</sup>

A mission that is partisan for the weak and those unjustly treated scandalizes some believers because they think it contradicts the impartiality of God who sends the sun and the rain upon good and evil alike. We encounter a paradox here. It is certainly true that God is gracious to all people, the great and the small, the righteous and the unrighteous. It should not be overlooked, however, that Jesus makes this affirmation in opposition to those who think that the grace of God was meant for them alone and who would thus restrict the goodness of God and the wideness of God's mercy. The message of

<sup>7</sup> See Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Douglas John Hall, *Confessing the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context*, vol. III (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 151.

scripture is that since God is the Creator of all and the Redeemer who in costly grace forgives the ungodly and receives them into the divine communion, we are called and empowered by grace to participate in God's activity of including the outsider, loving the despised, and embracing those we call our enemies. While it is true that God does not "play favorites," God does reach out for those who have been forgotten, abandoned, and abused. Hence, the church's faithfulness to the mission it has been given by its Lord is tested by whether it exercises a partisanship of love for the outsiders and the wretched of the world, however shocking and costly such partisanship may be.

5. *The missionary activity of the church is a participation in the mission of the Spirit of the triune God. The work of the Holy Spirit is marked by the renewal of persons and the creation of a new community of the remarkably diverse.* Just as the nature and mission of the church are determined by the mission of the incarnate Word, so the nature and mission of the church are defined by the missionary work of the Holy Spirit who is sent by Christ to bring his work to consummation. The work of the Spirit is liberative and creative of new persons and new and inclusive communities. According to the biblical witness, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom: freedom from all the powers that hold human beings in bondage, freedom from all the fears and forces that destroy life in community as God intended.

The Pentecost experience recorded in Acts 2 provides an important paradigm of the missionary work of the Holy Spirit. This incident has nothing to do with the experience of glossolalia or speaking in tongues as reported in the letters of Paul. It describes instead the coming of the Spirit as an event of new communication and new communion among people long separated from each other in faith, culture, and language. In the Pentecost event the Spirit works to enable communication, communion, and common confession among people of diverse languages and cultures without erasing those differences. Pentecost is an experience of new unity and mutual understanding in Christ amid great diversity.<sup>9</sup>

That the Spirit builds a new community of the reconciled is a central witness of the Pauline description of the miracle of the earliest Christian communities. He rejoices that in Christ the old walls that separated Jews and Gentiles have been torn down, and one new humanity has been created, a new humanity within which not only Jew and Gentile but also men and women, slave and free are now one in Christ. That for Paul is the evidence *par excellence* of the activity of the Spirit of Christ. While the new *koinonía* rooted in Christ, empowered by the Spirit, and celebrated in the eucharist is not

<sup>9</sup> See Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 1994).

entirely free of conflict, it nevertheless offers a foretaste of the justice, peace, and joy of the coming reign of God.

6. *As Spirit empowered and guided, the missionary activity of the church not only brings freedom and new community that includes those once considered strangers but also affirms the ministerial gifts of all its members.* The Holy Spirit equips all people for service to God and others. The division of the church into clerical leaders and lay followers is a distortion of the new community that God is bringing into being. In the power of the Spirit there is a new principle at work in the community of Christ. It is not a principle of hierarchy, according to which some are superior and others are inferior. Nor is it a principle of abstract equality, according to which members of the community are carbon copies or clones of each other. Instead, the Spirit at work in the community of Christ forms new persons in community, and bestows on each person a precious gift of service to be used for the well-being of the whole.

It is a cardinal mistake to try to find the proper analogy of this community of the Spirit in the organizational structures of corporations, politics, academy, or some other social form familiar to us. That effort inevitably leads to the accommodation of the Christian community to the structures and practices of the world. If we seek an analogy to the Spirit-empowered and Spirit-guided community of Christ, our reference must be to the triune life of God in whom personhood is profoundly communal and in whom equality allows for difference and difference does not subvert equality. The community of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit is *imago trinitatis*, a community of love and service in which each person expends self and receives self in continuous reciprocity, thus reflecting in creaturely community the perichoretic or mutually indwelling love of the persons of the Trinity.<sup>10</sup> This image of personhood in community transcends the individualistic notion of personhood as it also transcends the collectivistic idea of community. It is a new understanding of personhood and a new understanding of community, and it derives not from classical or modern secular concepts of person and community but from Christian faith in the triune God.<sup>11</sup>

7. *The missionary activity of the church is motivated by thanksgiving and joy rather than by fear or a sense of burdensome obligation.* A renewal of the church's confidence and a rebirth of joy in Christian life and mission will flow from reliance not upon ourselves but upon the Word and Spirit of the triune God. Becoming the church in worship, communion, and mission is motivated by

<sup>10</sup> See Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> For a recent trinitarian theology of "persons in communion," see Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991).



the gospel, not by fear of the law. It is a joyful permission, not a burdensome obligation.

All societies, even many families and friendships, are constituted by some kind of obligatory exchange process. There is a kind of circle of necessary exchange: a required act of giving and then a required act of giving back. The feudal lord gives protection to his serfs, and they in turn give back their allegiance and labor to him. Such is the nature of the exchange process that characterizes human community apart from a knowledge of the love of the triune God. The law of exchange that holds human beings together apart from grace is just that: it is law, obligation, duty.

The impulse to give joyfully to others and to receive joyfully the gifts of others defines true Christian community. Such community breaks out of the model of an obligatory exchange process. It is rooted in the superabundant, gracious, non-calculating, non-obligatory love of God that comes to us in Jesus Christ and the power of his Spirit. As the love of the triune God, it aims at mutuality and reciprocity among creatures rather than hierarchy and domination of some by others.<sup>12</sup> Thus within the trinitarian model of community, mission is taken up not as a burden, obligation, or necessity driven by fear for one's own salvation or fear for the other's damnation. It is a movement prompted by gratitude to God, the desire to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the hope of discovering new communion with others in the power of the Spirit.

Grounded in the missions of Christ and the Spirit, the mission of the church is to invite all people to new communion in the life of the triune God. Trinitarian ecclesiology and missiology are characterized not by the spirit of fear but by confidence and joy in "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor. 13:14).

### III. ADDRESSING THE HINDRANCES TO MISSION

In conclusion, I return to what I said earlier about the ways in which the Protestant understanding of the church and its mission has been seriously damaged in modern times.

In response to the need for a comprehensive ecclesiological and missiological vision, I have tried to present an understanding of the nature and mission of the church grounded in faith in the triune God. While the proposal advanced no doubt has some contemporary features and emphases, in its

<sup>12</sup> See Stephen H. Webb, *The Gifting God: A Trinitarian Ethics of Excess* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

broad outline it represents the classical Christian understanding of the life and mission of the church. Only with the eclipse of trinitarian doctrine in the modern era has the doctrine of the church become less and less certain of its basis. With the recent resurgence of trinitarian theology we may expect a corresponding rediscovery of the profound meaning of being the people of God called to participate in the communion of the triune God and called to invite others to share in that communion.

In response to the damage to the church caused by individualism, a trinitarian vision of the church as persons in communion offers a radically different model of what it means to be human and what it means to be a person. Far from being an ideal to be emulated, the Enlightenment notion of the person as "pure identity"—isolated, solitary, and self-enclosed—would appear to be a veritable image of the soul suffering damnation.<sup>13</sup> Made in the image of the triune God, we are made for community, for God is self-giving, other-affirming, community-forming love. The church is not called to be a paradigm of successful individuals or of free-enterprise corporations but a provisional representation of God's own eternal life in *koinonia*, the communion of the triune God.

In response to the confusion caused by the secularization of the church, a trinitarian ecclesiology and missiology offers a genuinely evangelical understanding of the nature and mission of the church rather than a triumphalistic one. The church does not exist on the basis of its own power, and it does not engage in activities under the assumption that it is capable of bringing in God's reign. The church confesses that the true and primary basis of Christian communion and Christian mission is the being and mission of the triune God.

Finally, in response to the criticisms of the church's complicity in patterns of exclusion and injustice, a trinitarian ecclesiology and missiology finds its basis in the confession of God's own missionary activity of reaching out to the world, welcoming strangers, and seeking just and peaceful communion even with those once considered enemies. As Douglas John Hall writes, "Christian mission is premised upon the belief that the triune God is already present and active in the world and that the church can only *follow*, so far as possible, this prior, extensive, and only partially comprehensible mission of God."<sup>14</sup> Through the work of Jesus Christ and the Spirit we are reconciled and received into communion with God and others.

<sup>13</sup> For a powerful critique of the notion of "pure identity," see Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*.

<sup>14</sup> Hall, *Confessing the Faith*, 153.

A trinitarian missiology is a welcoming missiology. God's purpose from the foundation of the world is to welcome sinners and all who are broken and abandoned into the triune community of reciprocal self-giving love. Christian mission is beautifully summarized by the Apostle Paul's appeal to his sisters and brothers in Rome: "Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you" (Rom. 15:7).

# Truthfulness in Church Music

by MARTIN TEL

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THERE IS a traditional prayer from Kenya that is found in the United Methodist Hymnal. It has been instructive to me as I consider my role at Princeton Theological Seminary as a worship leader and educator in matters of church music:

From the cowardice that dares not face new truth,  
from the laziness that is contented with half-truth,  
from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth,  
Good Lord, deliver me. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

I chose this prayer as a guide for this article, because it addresses our search for truth. So often we ignore the fact that we must worship in truth. We may be unclear as to what this truth is, or whether it is even possible for us to know what this truth is. But in matters of worship, we would do better to ask the question, "What is Truth?" than "What do we like?" or "What are our desired results?" Probably everyone with an opinion about the future of church music has at least some piece of truth. As the prayer from Kenya intimates, we are often apt to be satisfied with parts of the truth and to run with our own tiny fragments of truth. But, on the contrary, we should be struggling together to be more and more wholly truthful. This can never be accomplished by scolding one another or separating ourselves from one another. Let us be one in our supplication to God for deliverance.

In the course of this article I will make reference to two camps. They are known by many names: on the one side are the traditionalists, conservatives, or classicists; on the other side are the progressives or those subscribing to more contemporary or popular forms. By naming these two camps I do not mean to legitimize the polarity; nor would I suggest that there are only two positions on the spectrum; nor do I think that the names necessarily fit. Those who consider themselves traditional are often out of touch with the tradition, and many who consider themselves contemporary are stuck in the past. I only

<sup>1</sup> *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 597.

use these terms to facilitate our searching. It makes more sense to me to refer to the categories as they are currently perceived than to take an exorbitant amount of space skirting the names of the conflicting parties. We must acknowledge and assess our current state of affairs before we can honestly walk away from our old ways.

## I. COWARDICE THAT DARES NOT FACE NEW TRUTH

What is new truth? Why do we cower in the face of new truth? New truth to the musician or artist is creativity. Creativity is not necessarily completely new. In fact, for humans it may be argued that creativity must always be connected to that which already is. But we use the word “creative” very loosely these days. When someone does something new or novel, or something “different” we rush in to say that he or she is creative. But not all that is new is creative. Much of our newness shows little consideration for integrity, authenticity, and the delights of the imagination. Are we bound to newness? No. Are we bound to embrace new truth? Are we commanded to be open to creativity? Definitely. God has modeled creativity. As image-bearers we cannot choose to ignore creativity.

We church musicians are a privileged lot because we are employed to practice the past. This is not always encouraged in other arts (for example, the visual arts or dance). This rehearsing of history is not a bad thing. It is commendable, but if it stops there it is also ridiculous. Rehearsing only the tradition without creatively exploring the present and the future is a privilege the church cannot afford.

The church in the modern age has by and large surrendered her role as a participant in the contemporary and creative artistic enterprise. Modern art, whether it be music or otherwise, has been relegated to the sphere of the museum. Museums are ironically becoming what the church ought to be: People searching for meaning and wholeness who find art with integrity, contemporary expressions which arise out of a tradition. Many a traditionalist church meanwhile has become a museum in a much more narrow sense. They have become archives of the long ago. Many a progressive church has nothing truly creative to offer either. Very little is ever truly new. Mostly one hears yesteryear’s top forty warmed over. Harold M. Best writes:

This is a fact: *Somebody will always be creatively authentic.* So why shouldn’t it be the church? . . . If it is true that those who live by faith are the most capable of receiving, celebrating, and offering up the newest, the most daring, and—in the biblical sense—the most scandalous, then is it not



something approaching outright shame for the church to be content with artistic inauthenticity and creative second-handedness?<sup>2</sup>

Cowardice prevents us from worshiping and ministering incarnationally. Why new truth? The doctrine of the incarnation demands it. Calvin M. Johansson writes that "the incarnational approach to directing the church music program means that the musician must be responsive to the congregation's thinking, realizing that church music must have significant meaning for them."<sup>3</sup> There is a word for all this and it is a word that many have come to see as a compromising word. That word is "relevance." But "relevance" is not a dirty word. To be relevant means to be in the thick of new truth. It is cowardice which avoids the question of relevance in worship. There is good reason for fear and good reason for proceeding cautiously. Nevertheless, Christ demonstrated through the incarnation a concern to be relevant to those he encountered. It is unethical for us to continue in the truth we know if it takes forms completely unrecognizable to those whom we are serving.

Cowardice finds its bedfellow in conformity. Cowardice would rather conform than be active in the creative enterprise. Progressives are often railed against for conforming to a culture that places more emphasis on the quantitative than the qualitative. Admittedly, there is a problem here. But traditionalists are often unable to see how they are indicted by conformity as well.

In Tacoma, where I grew up, we turned up our noses to the dramatic presentation of "The Singing Christmas Tree" by the Life Center Church. The choir was arranged on a huge tree structure that would twirl and sparkle as the choir sang. It was showy. It was a Disneyland Christmas. The allure of this glitziness was all the more real to inhabitants of the Pacific Northwest who were experiencing their thirtieth straight day of overcast skies. They wanted to see lights, action! But we knew better. We paraded to our service of "Nine Lessons and Carols," patterned after King's College Chapel of Cambridge, England. We followed the prescribed scripture readings. The carols and anthems were the same "greats" you would expect to hear in Cambridge. We even ensured that those who read the scriptures did so with English accents. If this is not conformity, I don't know what is! To be sure, if one is to conform, one might do well to conform to King's College, Cambridge, but is

<sup>2</sup> Harold M. Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 214-5.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin M. Johansson, *Music and Ministry: A Biblical Counterpoint* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1984), 34.

avoidance of new truth, of new creativity, an option? In our search for a more complete truth, the avoidance of new truth is not a valid option.

Last year, we celebrated our traditional “Carols of Many Nations” service as a seminary community. The choirs and the congregation sang many of the familiar carols. All sang with gusto. But there was one contemporary hymn which put many people on edge. It meant that they had to switch off the autopilot and contemplate what they were singing. The new hymn was one by the contemporary poet, Brian Wren, entitled “Her Baby Newly Breathing.” It is a hymn that takes very seriously both the wonderment of motherhood and the even greater wonderment of the incarnation:

Her baby, newly breathing,  
with wailing needful cry,  
by Mary kissed and cradled,  
is lulled in lullaby.

Long months of hope and waiting,  
the thrill and fear of birth,  
are crowned with exultation,  
and God is on the earth.

The eyes that gaze on Mary  
have yet to name or trace  
the world of shape and color,  
or recognize a face;  
yet Holiness Eternal  
is perfectly expressed  
in hands that clutch unthinking,  
and lips that tug the breast.

The milk of life is flowing  
as Mary guides and feeds  
her wordless Word, embodied  
in infant joys and needs.

Enormous, formless strivings,  
and yearnings deep and wide,  
becradled in communion,  
are fed and satisfied.

How mother-like the Wisdom  
that carried and gave birth  
to all things seen and unseen,  
and nurtured infant earth:  
unstinting, unprotected,  
prepared for nail and thorn,  
constricted into maleness,  
and of a woman born.<sup>4</sup>

One person later protested that “her nativity set didn’t look nothing like that!” Well, maybe we need nativity sets that capture afresh the realness of the incarnation. The fact is, this modern hymn adds little new content to the traditional carols; it merely communicates such in a contemporary way. We have no problem singing “all is bright round yon virgin mother and child,” “offspring of the virgin’s womb, veiled in flesh the Godhead see,” or “Lo, he abhors not the virgin’s womb.” And thus we sing blissfully about “offspring,” “conceiving virgins,” a God who “abhors not the womb” and embraces the

<sup>4</sup> Brian Wren, *Piece Together Praise: A Theological Journey* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Hope Publishing Co., 1986), 20.

"veil of flesh." But umbilical cords and colicky, crying babies who nurse from their mother's breast and do whatever else babies do, this gets too close for comfort. We want to return to the veil of nineteenth-century archaic language. We want to return to historic metaphors that keep the "realness," the truth of the incarnation at arm's length. Christmas, and thus Christianity, is suddenly a messy thing, a scandal. But the church is challenged to be open to new and renewed truth. The old truth has not become untrue, but by being ossified it fails to communicate the whole truth. In guarding tradition without embracing new creativity, we can strip the gospel of its power.

Many churches are discovering what is being termed today "World Music." Because of the pervasiveness of mass media in the United States, it is becoming increasingly necessary to look beyond our borders in our search for true folk music. As it becomes more and more apparent that we are living in a global community, we must become more and more intentional about our use of songs from faraway places. The church spans the whole wide earth. We must not sing about *them* but with *them*. Indeed, it is no longer "they" and "them," but us. And so we sing with our sisters and brothers in Zimbabwe: "If you believe and I believe, and we together pray, the Holy Spirit must come down and set God's people free," and in so doing we gain a sense for the hope and struggles that oppressed people feel.<sup>5</sup> And as our choirs sing a rhythmic "Halleluya! We sing your praises," we rejoice with brothers and sisters in South Africa, who against all oppression, have found voices to sing praises to God.<sup>6</sup>

Another element of many of our worship services, which is regarded by many as new, is the chorus or refrain. Of course there are many who find little to commend in "scripture choruses," and others who find little to commend besides this genre. In this reflection I would like us to consider what useful purpose such simple music might have. Why move toward such a simple form? Hasn't God given us intellect capable of much more? All this simplicity can be so dulling. Well, perhaps this is true, but remember we are a community, and worship, according to the doctrine of the incarnation, must be relevant, and not only to those mature members steeped in the traditions of the church. Children also need to be able to enter at their cognitive level. The unchurched, while they should not be expected to understand all elements of worship, should find elements that are musically and/or textually capable of being grasped. Don't we all need a simple song sometimes lest we be tempted

<sup>5</sup> In *Sent by the Lord: Songs of the World Church*, Vol. 2, ed. John L. Bell (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 1990), 51.

<sup>6</sup> In *Freedom is Coming: Songs of Protest and Praise from South Africa*, ed. Anders Nyberg (Fort Lauderdale: Walton Music Corp., 1984), 33.



to glory in our intellectual prowess? And why should simpleness be understood as an indication of a lack of quality? The amazing neutron unlocks secrets of each living organism. The single blade of grass points to the complexity of the galaxy. Why have we vilified words such as relevance, simplicity, or even shallowness? Does every river of liturgy or music need to run deeply? Shallowness, it may be argued, is appropriate at times, so long as it runs pure and does not stagnate.

## II. LAZINESS THAT IS CONTENTED WITH HALF-TRUTH

The Christian faith is full of antinomies. To speak about this musically is to refer to a counterpoint: two opposing lines play against each other, but when aligned correctly, there is a beautiful whole, greater than the sum of the parts. If we were to focus on instances of dissonance created by the contrapuntal lines we would have good reason to believe that they do not belong together. But when we put the lines together, we find that the dissonance makes the truth even stronger.

Church music has moved into a contentious war zone; opinions have become entrenched. Yet no one position can possess the whole truth. No single thread or line can contain all. We are apt to be more contented with half-truth than work through the oftentimes dissonant counterpoint to a much greater truth.

Earlier, I made a case for relevance. There cannot be a truthful music ministry without relevance. Relevance also has its counterpoint and this is excellence. Excellence is excelling. For this, Harold Best gives a most wonderful and succinct definition: *we becoming better than we once were.*<sup>7</sup> Though most would have no problem with this definition, many become uneasy when we begin to unpack the word “better.” We becoming *better* than we once were. If we are to accept excellence as a standard we must not deny that there is “better-than-ness,” that is, there is a hierarchy of goodness.<sup>8</sup> Creation itself suggests that some things are considered better than others. God unequivocally calls the creation good. Yet, there is enough inference from the scriptures and subsequent traditions to indicate that hierarchies exist that determine “better-than-ness,” despite the intrinsic goodness in all creation.

But “better-than-ness” alone cannot determine what is most excellent or what is most wholly truthful. Excellence must be set with its counterpoint:

<sup>7</sup> Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 108.

<sup>8</sup> The term “better-than-ness” was also coined by Best.

relevance. Excellence itself is relative, because it is set in the context of growth. Remember the definition of excellence: "we *becoming* better than we once were." We must not in the name of excellence be irrelevant. Harold Best compares this with trying to determine by some criteria that Bach is better than bluegrass. It is one thing to make such an assertion, but to perform a Bach fugue in the middle of a hoedown is quite another. Best writes, "Unless we are willing to say that the entire cultural and ethnic context, which includes the hoedown, is aesthetically suspect, we cannot question the worth and value of bluegrass as the best kind of music for that context. The real task is to find the best bluegrass while weeding out the worst."<sup>9</sup> Hierarchy is not all. Our striving for excellence must be relevant to the context.

The real crisis of church music, or for that matter, any part of life, is our contentedness to live with half-truths. When we separate the counterpoints of relevance and excellence this becomes apparent. An emphasis on excellence alone leads to the idolatry of aestheticism. On the other hand, those who emphasize only relevance will tend to focus only on results. After all, if it ministers, if it brings the people in, yes, even brings them to authentic conversion experiences, should this not be the criteria for determining the worthiness of the medium, whether it be worship-music or otherwise?

According to the church's understanding of the objective nature of excellence, the answer must be that the ends do *not* justify the means. Does God have God's way through mediocrity or even disobedience? Yes. Why does God work God's way this way? I don't know! But there are many examples of this in scripture. Water flows from a rock smitten by a staff, when it should have been spoken to. In Philippians (1:15) we read that the gospel was being preached out of envy, yet with apparent effectiveness. My favorite example of God working this way is found in Numbers 22: "And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she spoke unto Balaam." God has God's way, and God will get the point across to Balaam, but this is not to say that this is God's preferred way of speaking. Harold Best remarks: "Even so, there are those who might assume that because God chooses to speak these ways at times and seemingly allows positive results to come about, they should either use, or become, jackasses themselves."<sup>10</sup>

Best nicely summarizes the dilemma of attempting to be relevant without any concern for excellence:

Musical choices, technologies, and programming often play a major role in growth strategies. These may certainly be all right in themselves. But what

<sup>9</sup> Best, *Music Through the Eyes of Faith*, 106.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

is not all right is why some churches try to outdo, try to keep up with, or try to mimic each other. Who is to say how large or imitative one church should get, simply because another one is growing exponentially? Who is to assume that major musical adjustments are to be made in order to bring one church up to the seeming effectiveness of another? How much of this is undertaken through the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, and how much is done because church growth looks so good that we covet it? And to what extent do excellence and musical values guide the actions? Largeness and smallness are not, in themselves, a sign of God's intervention or lack of it. They may well be signs of envy, competition, laziness or boredom. In reality, God works through a range of quality from mediocrity to excellence. Instead of wondering why God works through mediocrity at all, we should assume that God would prefer excellence, but not at the expense of spiritual integrity. And spiritual integrity has primarily to do with why we make music, not what music we make. As much as we must strive for quality, it will not impress God all by itself. At the same time, our reasons for making music must not knowingly exclude high standards. We cannot afford to rest with mediocrity because it is effective.<sup>11</sup>

In the wake of technological advances and the far-reaching effects of mass media and mass culture, laziness is probably the greatest impediment to excellence. We feel we can afford to be lazy because technology can be depended upon to cover up the blemishes. Electronic steroids make us seem bigger, faster, more technically exact than we really are. The technicians are able to manipulate any voice, any talent, however raw or undisciplined, to sound as if it is able to pull off a quality performance with little or no effort. Let's call it what it is: a cover-up, and to an entire generation it is proving to be an impediment to striving for excellence.

This is often pointed out to me by the international seminarians who come from technologically less developed nations. They want to know where the music comes from. They hear sounds being blasted in larger-than-life forms through auditoriums, malls, and shopping streets. They are amazed by the CD recordings of perfectly balanced and blended voices and instruments. But they want to know where the sound comes from, and when they learn that the output of the technological animal has so little to do with the input, they suddenly become disinterested. They return to their drums, or their flutes, or their songs, or simply put their hands against their knees, and they produce the most beautiful sounds and mesmerizing rhythms. In the excellence of

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

their art the room seems to dance. Their art is far in advance of our technologically dependent "contemporary Christian artists," and yet we have the gall to refer to theirs as "developing" countries and send "musical mission teams" to their lands! It is embarrassing.

Is God somehow impressed? Do we worship some kind of Baal-god who needs to be stirred to action by high decibels, by a technology that makes us seem bigger or better or faster than we actually are? Or, is God really interested in an honest, perhaps slower walk? What is it about honesty or truth in our music-making that we are afraid of? Will we not get the results *we* want? Will we be passed up? Are we dissatisfied with the talents we have been dealt? Or are we ashamed of the way we have invested them?

Another way our music only expresses half of the truth is manifest in our fascination with the upbeat, the celebrative, the happy thoughts—practices which smother any honest musical expression of pain, anger, or lament. There is a problem—not only aesthetic but sociological and psychological—with worship that seeks to cover up all hurt and pain, the hell that many in the congregation have gone through in the previous week, with only or merely praise, praise, praise. Far too often we try to paint a happy face on God.

In our search for biblical directives to worship, why do we overlook the whole range of expression in the Psalms? The psalmist's model is true to life: Praise gives us standing to voice our lament. Truthful lament will lead us back to truthful praise. In commenting upon our almost complete emphasis on praise, Walter Brueggemann writes:

It is my judgment that this action of the church is less an evangelical defiance guided by faith, and much more a frightened, numb denial and deception that does not want to acknowledge or experience the disorientation of life. The reason for such relentless affirmation of orientation seems to come, not from faith, but from the wishful optimism of our culture. Such a denial and cover-up, which I take it to be, is an odd inclination for passionate Bible users, given the large number of psalms that are songs of lament, protest, and complaint about the incoherence that is experienced in the world. At least it is clear that a church that goes on singing "happy songs" in the face of raw reality is doing something very different from what the Bible itself does.<sup>12</sup>

Let us be cautious when we are tempted to put advertisements in the local paper for "up-beat, celebrative services." Can such worship experiences be

<sup>12</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 51-52.



deemed wholly truthful? Are we trading in some of the truth as we rally around the idolatry of happiness? Is it right to smother the intensity and scope of our suffering with joyful songs?

Half-truths are also sometimes promulgated by the impropriety of tune with text or manner of singing. We often espouse the false dichotomy which separates the medium from the message. When the medium in some way is at odds with the message, this is improper. In my family's congregation there was a perception by some that our worship services were boring. Immediately all attention was focused on the music. It was decided that things needed to be sped up and given a popular flavor. Drum sets were enlisted to help the hymns move along, to make them sound more modern. In an effort to hype us out of our boredom, our congregation so tightly laced many of our songs that it rendered them powerless to convey their "truth." I have sung "Amazing Grace" in this pop, sped-up version. There was something missing. One is only left with a residue. As song moves on to song, one feeling is almost indistinguishable from the next. The impropriety of this became clear to me just a month or two ago when I went to a concert put on by the Jubilee Singers of Westminster Choir College. Together we sang "Amazing Grace" in the Trinity Church of Princeton. The choir conductor, Donald Dumpson, stopped us halfway through the first phrase and said, "No, you've got it all wrong. Slower!" The gospel choir tried to hold us back, but we did it again. Dumpson stopped us again and said, "What do you think you're doing singing a song that way? Think about the text. Don't just sing it, moan it!" He coached us along and eventually we caught on; the gospel song came alive for many of us like never before. Stop and think about that for a moment. Society moves at break neck speed. Is this good? Is this truthful? Must we follow suit? Work out your worship. Don't let it be only half-truthful.

Another example of impropriety cropped up in the course of planning chapel services here last February. The preacher for a particular chapel service was an African-American student by the name of Carl Allen. He had requested that we sing the hymn "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah," but not to the tune in the hymnal. I thought, "What? Now what's wrong with our tune?" He explained to me that in his particular tradition they experienced the text in a different way. He proceeded to sing for me: "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah / Pilgrim through this barren land / I am weak, but thou art mighty / hold me with thy powerful hand." He sang it to a melody that closely resembled the tune we associate with "I will arise and go to Jesus," known by the tune names "Arise" and "Restoration." Carl sang it slowly and with pathos. At that moment it hit me, "So *that's* what this hymn is all about!"

Now, I find it difficult to sing this hymn in the customary way. The tune "Cwm Rhondda" and the manner in which we have come to sing this hymn dismisses the weariness that the text seeks to express. Our all-too-buoyant singing would make the barren land out to be some sort of circus. Sometimes it is not just a matter of impropriety, but a "less-than-best propriety" that prevents us from being wholly truthful in our worship.

A lot of contemporary material does the same. A text such as "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth" is set to a fun, uplifting, upbeat, catchy tune (perhaps pragmatically so) but one that is hardly majestic. Improprieties mask truth.

And finally, half-truth is never deep truth. I had mentioned earlier that there is a need for simpleness, even shallowness. Worship must offer children opportunities to worship at their cognitive level. But why is it necessary to worship with hymns, psalms, and anthems which carry deep truth? Why offer meat that can be so difficult for some to chew? Perhaps it could be stated that deep musical integrity and rich truth in hymns and psalms need to be a part of worship for the sake of the younger members whose cognitive abilities are ripe for taking in and memorizing material that will benefit them for the rest of their lives. The Old Testament refers to stones as tools for learning and memory. A pile of stones will enable an entire nation to remember their story. And so it is with song. In Deuteronomy 31 we hear God commanding Moses: "Now write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them . . . this song will testify against them, because *it will not be forgotten* by their descendants." I am willing to bet quite a sum that the song that Moses wrote down was more than "Let's Just Praise the Lord!" It had to have had content. Music, for reasons still not understood, is linked with memory and this memory served to sustain Israel's faith and is sorely needed to sustain ours as well. For reasons equally puzzling, children have an incredible capacity for memory. Why then should we deny them songs with interest, content, and substance—hymns that have been around and will be around when they grow old, when they have lost their precious capacity to memorize?

Consistent shallowness is boring. It has little to sustain our interest. In the long run it may not be able to sustain one's faith through trial and tribulation. And what about the visitors? Must we make everything comprehensible for everybody? One might argue that those who are new to Christian worship, if they are able to take in everything worship has to offer in one big gulp, will probably also find no need to return or will search elsewhere for deeper understanding.



Embracing counterpoint, embracing antinomies, embracing whole truth is a struggle we will face throughout our lives. The challenges are real. Ever since the Enlightenment, antinomies have become very unpopular. But in our quest to communicate the gospel, we cannot afford to do with half-truth.

### III. ARROGANCE THAT THINKS IT KNOWS ALL TRUTH

I confess that I do not know all truth. I also confess that I sometimes act as if I do! I am genetically disposed to thinking I know it all. Not only are the Dutch known for their obstinacy, but the people from the northern province of Friesland have gained notoriety within a small kingdom as *stijfkoppen*, that is “stiff-headed” people convinced of their rightness. My parents are from Friesland. There is a saying in the Netherlands: “One Frisian: a dike; two Frisians: a church, three Frisians: a schism.” In the course of this article, if I have come across as knowing it all, lovingly sift my words. Music is an emotional thing and has emotional attachments. In our passion about church music, it is easy to close our ears to one another and revert to schismatic isolation. But we mustn’t stop listening to one another.

Arrogance thrives on musical opinions which are set in stone. When we pray for deliverance from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, then we must lay aside all absolutized opinions. Such opinions deny the antinomy of truth. They play only one part of the counterpoint, and though it may be a beautiful melody, it is a denial of the harmony for which it was composed. We must accept more than we prefer. We must not predetermine what people are capable of and thus in effect prevent their growth.

We need to love and to be lovely people. As clergy and musicians we have often been less than lovely in our dealings with parishioners and with each other. I’m not talking about the idea of love that simply does what the other wants. That is not pastoral love. But if we strove for, and searched for, and together prayed for, greater and greater excellence and loveliness in our vocations, perhaps the music of our congregations would become more and more lovely as well, and rise to new levels of excellence; if we would only dream it possible.

Arrogance dismisses truth and honesty. If we wish for the individuals who make up the church to live honestly and with integrity, then we must not do otherwise in our worship. Our worship must walk an honest walk, strive for excellence with the means that we have been given. We must be honest with one another. Untruthful politeness in our relationship to God and one another is deadly. Don E. Saliers writes: “Dislike of others, never checked by speaking and listening honestly, turns to scapegoating and falsehood. So we in

the church make peace with prejudices and with fear of 'the other.'"<sup>13</sup> To this I would add the temptation to make peace by turning to two or more alternative worship services, which never really resolves the prejudices but rather works against greater truth by separating the community and the dynamic counterpoint.

Arrogance leads us to focus on ourselves when things go well and on others when there is a problem. It would be helpful if we refocused our attention completely. Our frustrations with music in the church are usually not the real problem, but rather a symptom of a deeper problem. Music ministries of the church often serve as a convenient lightning rod to take the heat off other inadequacies in our communal living. After all, why do we have so much time and energy to belabor these worship questions in the first place? I am not suggesting that worship matters are light matters, but stripped from *leitourgia*, the ongoing work of the church, our worship becomes an offense to the Lord. The prophet Amos brings the word of God: "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies . . . Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (5:21-24).

Saliers recounts a powerful way to refocus attention. He writes:

When liturgy is reconnected to common ministry and learning, hope will spring forth, like the flowers blossoming in the desert Isaiah envisioned. In several congregations I know, a common commitment to building houses for Habitat for Humanity has fostered precisely such a blossoming of hope. After searching for various solutions to the problem of "routine" worship, they discovered that, for them, the solution was not first in the sanctuary at all. It involved finding a connection between what was done outside and inside the sanctuary. As one person put it, . . . "We finally had something to pray about besides ourselves, and when we finished, we had something to praise God for."<sup>14</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION

I would challenge all of us to reflect on music theologically. We often dive into worship assuming that we will learn from our experience, assuming we will learn from our mistakes. It will not work that way and we will not grow if we are content to repeat our experiences without reflecting theologically on what we do. Clergy often distrust the judgments of trained musicians, yet at

<sup>13</sup> Don E. Saliers, *Worship Come to Its Senses* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 54.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

the same time are unwilling to delve into serious musical understanding themselves. Musicians lament this and yet, in turn, are often unwilling to be involved in serious theological inquiry. The result of all this is embarrassing. We have succeeded only in making fools of one another and hoping in all of this that God might be heard. But even if God does work wonders despite our arrogance, this should not give us the satisfaction in continuing with the status quo.

In closing, I would challenge all of us to be hopeful. Even when the situation seems hopeless, and sometimes church musicians have much to fear, I feel that I have no other choice but to hope. I am expected to hope. Between the lines of this lecture I have intimated that there is a growing crisis in worship that is splitting congregations and denominations. Let us not stick our heads in the sand. But neither let us publish book after book with our solutions. I understand our enthusiasm for solutions but at this point I am convinced it is more important to lay out the crisis truthfully. We need to learn to ask good questions. We need to learn the art of searching without expecting or demanding hasty answers. Let us study the roots of our dilemmas. Let us relevantly educate for excellence and stop assuming that excellence or relevance will somehow happen on its own. And in all this, let us be hopeful, knowing that at the right time God will renew God's people, as God has done countless times in the past. Then, we will be afforded new energy, new creativity, and new vision.

# Singing a New Song: The Gospel and Jazz

by WILLIAM G. CARTER

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THERE ARE two statues in my study at First Presbyterian Church in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania. One depicts Moses with the Ten Commandments, reminding me of my ongoing work as a minister of Word and Sacrament. I am a graduate of this institution. I have been ordained to preach and teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I am a child of the church and a servant of the Living God. Moses stands on top of my bookshelf, right next to the 22-volume set of Calvin's commentaries. At the other end of the room, however, is a statue given to me by my dear friend, Harry Freebairn. The statue sits, somewhat appropriately, on the window sill, and it portrays a clown playing the piano. It calls to mind the hundreds of nights I have spent as a jazz pianist in clubs and concert halls. When I sit at my desk, these two statues form a parenthesis around my life. Sometimes, I can even hear them talking to one another.

At times, the conversation has been muted, if not out of earshot. In 1982, I entered Princeton Seminary as a professional musician. I was the only student in my M.Div. class who had had the distinction of playing in every Elks Club in upstate New York. I went from a schedule of five nights a week as a musician to five nights a week studying in Speer Library. I was certain the focus of my life would change when I completed my studies and entered the ministry. To some extent it did, as I now spend most of my time with respectable, daytime folk in the suburbs of Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Yet the Lord has a funny way of keeping us in touch with our roots. Moses the preacher and Bozo the pianist have kept talking to one another all these years. I have begun to hear some things in their conversation that I would like to share with you. The music of jazz has many implications for Christian faith and life. At times, jazz has become for me something of a metaphor for faith. Tonight I want to talk about what I've heard and to let you hear it for yourself.

Before we get too wrapped up in the music, Moses reminds me that I am a preacher. Every preacher needs a text. Listen to Isaiah 42:10-16:

Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the end of the earth! Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants. Let the desert and its towns lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits; let

the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy, let them shout from the tops of the mountains. Let them give glory to the LORD, and declare his praise in the coastlands. The LORD goes forth like a soldier, like a warrior he stirs up his fury; he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against his foes. For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor, I will gasp and pant. I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbage; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools. I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them.

The theme for this Institute of Theology is a familiar phrase from scripture: "Sing a New Song to the Lord." It appears six times in the book of Psalms and, as we heard, once in Isaiah 42. It also appears twice in the Christian apocalypse, the Book of Revelation. In each case, the people of God are summoned to claim a new tune, to embrace a new lyric, to step to a new dance. God is doing something new, and, as a means of echoing God's new activity, we are called upon to "sing a new song to the Lord." According to these biblical texts, God is stirring up our world. A good way to participate in God's new order is to make some new music, to sing a new song.

Now, that's what we expect to hear at an event like this. We gather this week to think about newness. The century is on the brink of flipping over. American culture continues to change and churn. Religious communities are facing upheaval. There are all kinds of new songs being sung in our world. We hear multicultural melodies, strange tribal rhythms, and challenging technological two-steps. Some songs are refreshing. Some songs are frightening. All of these songs are new. How do we sort out the shallow pop melodies that are played today and gone tomorrow from the tunes that stir the heart and ground us in hope? That is a question that music and theology hold in common.

The jazz tradition can speak to our theological tradition. In many ways, the jazz world is as fractured by denominationalism as the Protestant church. There are lines drawn between the dixieland camp, the big band community, the bebop cult, and the cool jazz enclave. There are people who prefer the free jazz of the 1960s over the hard bop of the 1950s. Some prefer the hybrid eclectic jazz of the past twenty years over the neoorthodoxy movement of Wynton Marsalis. Whatever the case, jazz is a kind of music that specializes in new songs. In fact, some songs are so new that you will never hear them again in quite the same way. Even when there is an established tune with melody, harmony, and rhythm, the music always sounds new.



The first thing to say is that new songs are always built from the stuff of old songs. A few minutes ago, we heard Isaiah call us to “sing to the Lord a new song.” Walter Brueggemann comments: “If we listen to the singing, we discover that the new song is constituted by the same old words. The old words are recovered and reclaimed.”<sup>1</sup> The new song is not merely a return to a kinder, gentler age. Neither is it a trip down Nostalgia Avenue. No, it is a radical discovery that the songs our mothers taught us to sing have awesome power and movement for a new day. The new song given by God is always a song that began in the past, yet is brought forward to this time, this place, and these circumstances.

That is what jazz musicians do: they take old songs and bring them forward into something new. When musicians make jazz, they participate in an act of new creation. They build new melodies with the basic materials of harmony, rhythm, and old tunes. The music is created on the spot with imagination, humor, and great freedom. Is it inspired by the Holy Spirit? Perhaps, but like most acts of God, the inspiration is revealed only in subtlety through hard work and flashes of unpredicted brilliance.

As Hugh Roberts has noted, “Jazz is a music in which the line between composition and performance is blurred, for its essence is improvisation: composing while performing.”<sup>2</sup> There may be a melody and a sequence of chord symbols on paper, but little of the music is actually written down. Even less is nailed down. This often bewilders classically-trained musicians, who are usually bound to the black dots on a manuscript. Most modern jazz musicians are excellent readers of printed music since their craft requires performing in a wide variety of settings. Yet for them, music is *made*, not written. As a jazz musician would say: “written music” is a contradiction in terms.

Like sermons (at least, like my sermons), jazz tunes are unfinished. Both sermons and jazz performances are completed, not on the bandstand or in the chancel, but in the lives of those who have ears to hear. The impact can never be planned or managed, even if there are common assumptions about the music’s form and feel. Jazz musicians play with an attitude of nearly complete freedom. While most jazz players are highly proficient instrumentalists, they are astonishingly casual about making music. They practice hard off the bandstand in order that their performed music will become an act of play.

<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann, “Disciplines of Readiness,” Dedication of the Presbyterian Center, Presbyterian Church (USA), Louisville, Kentucky, 28 October 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh J. Roberts, “Improvisation, Individuation, and Immanence: Thelonious Monk,” *Black Sacred Music* 3 (1989) 50-56.



This openness to music as an art-in-progress makes these musicians particularly receptive to the guidance of a spirit beyond their own capacity.

One night at the Deer Head Inn, a jazz club in the Poconos, pianist Jim McNeely quipped that "improvisation is an act of faith." This means that the act of playing jazz, like daily life, is an informed risk. Improvisation happens through nimble fingers, serious training in music theory and form, and a willingness to jump into uncharted territory. It takes disciplined, technical preparation to play this music, and it also requires the freedom to take enormous risks. You work hard to lift the music from the page and release it into the air. Yet there is always a safety net of grace. If a musician hits a sour note or flubs a rhythm, it cannot be replayed, only forgiven. There will be another opportunity to play better notes on another day. These basic characteristics of jazz make it particularly congenial to the life of Christian faith.

The question arises: how do you learn to play this music? For a short time in high school, I took weekly piano lessons from a musician who was a legendary figure in our community. The word around town was that he had traveled with a few big bands but had now settled down to a regular gig in a local tavern. Even so, he never crawled out of bed before noon and rarely left his darkened house before sunset. He had the complexion of a ghost and mumbled when he spoke. Lenny was the honest-to-goodness article, a real professional musician. I used to cling to his insights, partly because I paid him twenty dollars for a thirty-minute lesson, a sum equivalent to my income from mowing four lawns.

Lenny taught me a great deal about the harmonies and rhythms of jazz. Most of all, he taught me that when it comes to art, one can only learn so much from a book. I recall him sitting in the shadows next to his piano. After sucking the life out of a Kool Menthol, he said, "You know, I can teach you how to swing melodies and lay down hip chords, but that won't make you a musician. If you want to play jazz, you must *study what you hear and then play it.*"<sup>3</sup>

Lenny's wry wisdom has something to say to anyone who attempts to live the gospel. Jazz music swings in a way that cannot be copied on paper. The mood and feel of music cannot be duplicated by mechanically reproducing the notes from a written manuscript. To become jazz, musical phrases must be given a certain spin in the air. Music is similar to the spoken word in this respect. In other words, if you want to learn how to play jazz music, listen to

<sup>3</sup> A more complete account of the process of learning jazz (and its relationship to learning the art of preaching) can be found in William G. Carter, "On Speaking What We Hear," *Journal for Preachers* 14 (1990) 25-32.

some of the masters who have learned how to interpret old melodies in a new way. If you want to learn faith, pay attention to the communion of saints who worked it out before you ever appeared on the scene. Put yourself in the pedagogical tradition of the apostle Paul who instructed the people in his church by the words, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

There is something about jazz that simply cannot be written down. You learn it by living the notes, under the influence of those who have done so before you. This is partly due to the emotional possibilities of the music. A full range of feelings can infuse music. Like the lyrics of biblical Psalms and songs, jazz music can express an astonishing variety of human emotions. Within the song of Isaiah, we hear sounds of joy and cries for help, labor pains and peaceful silence, the thunder of praise and the screams of fury. All of these sounds are appropriately human, and appropriately offered to God. So it is with jazz.

A jazz quartet can utter things in the presence of God that words alone cannot say. A saxophone can lament on behalf of the helpless. A piano may offer intercessions for the needy. A string bass can affirm the firm foundation of faith. Drums and cymbals may call pilgrims to break into joy. It depends upon the purposes for which the music is intended. As the *Presbyterian Directory for Worship* notes, "Instrumental music may be a form of prayer since words are not essential to prayer" (W-2.1004). Sometimes the music can speak for us as the fullness of human expression.

Moreover, sometimes the music can speak of something far beyond us. Neil Leonard, a music critic, has written about the possibilities for transcendence that can occur when people hear musicians improvising together. Among jazz fans, he observes, there have been moments when

jazz answered needs that traditional faiths did not address. While the music had different meanings for different followers—black or white, male or female, young or old, rich or poor, in various psychological states and social situations—for all devotees it provided some form of ecstasy or catharsis transcending the limitations, dreariness, and desperation of ordinary existence.<sup>4</sup>

Something new not only happens as this music is made; something new can happen as people hear this music. The song can change us. Not only does it sound new—it carries us to a new place. God's song points us beyond all pain to a redemptive future where all things are made new.

<sup>4</sup> Neil Leonard, *Jazz: Myth and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 178.

In the faithful imagination of Isaiah, it is the Lord Almighty who brings about new life. According to Isaiah's astonishing text, God is like a pregnant woman. God says, "For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor, I will gasp and pant." A whole new creation is about to be born. Then the Holy One goes on to say, "I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them."

In my mind, the best jazz musicians are not those who merely express themselves or "cry out in labor." They are the ones who lead us down a road we would not have known in any other way. More than expression, we want insight. We want to travel a road that takes us into the presence of God, which is first and foremost a beautiful presence, where there is light, levity, refreshment, and new life.

I think of John Coltrane, a gifted jazz musician who worked hard to develop his craft. He practiced constantly. When Coltrane played with the Miles Davis group, he would often improvise solos lasting fifteen or twenty minutes. It annoyed his boss. The band would play a tune. Everybody took a turn. Then Miles would nod at Coltrane, who played on and on. One night Miles said, "Trane, why do you play so long?"

John said, "It took that long to get it all in."

Another time after a lengthy Coltrane improvisation, Miles asked him, "Why do you play so many notes?"

John responded, "Once I get started, I don't know how to stop."

Miles said, "Take the horn out of your mouth."<sup>5</sup>

After he left Miles Davis and started his own group, something changed. One morning, Coltrane told his wife about a vision that came to him. "I heard a song," he claimed. "It sounded like the angels." He spent his remaining years searching for that song on his saxophone. Needless to say, he used a lot of notes.

There is an apocryphal story about a music critic who, years later, asked him the same question Miles Davis used to ask, "Why do you play so many notes?" Coltrane said, "I'm looking for the right note."

The interviewer said, "What if you should find it?" Coltrane thought for a minute, then said, "I'll play it again."

Within this music, you can often hear a yearning for transcendence. We desire to sound the right note, the holy note, the beautiful note.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Crow, *Jazz Anecdotes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 324-25.

I may be a closet Platonist, but I truly believe there is a realm of beauty and joy which is just out of our reach. An artist aspires to touch these things without clinging to them. That is why we make music with the tips of our fingers or on the edge of our lips. We can touch the music beyond us but we can never possess it. We can be transformed by some higher power but it's our task to work out the implications of that transformation. We can strive for a lifetime to play the one note that really counts but ultimately we have to find words to proclaim what we hear.

According to the fifth chapter of Revelation, there is a new song beyond the bruises and brutalities of this age. At times, it's nearly impossible to hear. When the world wears us down, we are tempted to wallow in the pain to such an extent that we neglect the music we were made to make. We can become so burdened by the world's injustice that we forget to praise our Judge. Here again, we can take our cue from musicians. Most of the true praise-makers in our society are hungry and underappreciated. Yet many know the secret strength of their art. Ask a musician, "Why do you work for near-poverty wages, in abysmal conditions, in uncertain times, for people who do not value your God-given gifts?" Musicians will respond without blinking, "The music is more important than me."

If the music is rooted in our traditions of faith and if it carries us toward the Holy One, it is a song with the power to set us free. And if we taste such freedom, we will do whatever we can to claim it as our own. We will cut our ties to the superficial Muzak of this age and tune our hearts to a holy symphony.

It reminds me of a piece of graffiti on a New York subway. This is what it said:

You can punch my lips so I can't blow my horn,  
but my fingers will find a piano.  
You can slam the piano lid on my fingers,  
but you can't stop my toes from tapping like a drum.  
You can stomp on my foot to keep my toes from tapping,  
but my heart will keep swinging in four / four time.  
You can even stop my heart from ticking,  
but the music of the saints shall never cease.

Is there truly a new song like this? Yes. It can only be performed by those who are equipped to embrace it, by those who are converted to hear it, and by those who are sufficiently transformed to dance to its rhythms. And if this is to



happen, we must change some of the ways we have done business as the church. Once again we can learn a lesson from jazz.

For a number of years, one of the basic models for church “work” has been the managerial model of the American corporation. In a recent book on theology, Daniel L. Migliore critiques this way of doing church work:

Still another obstacle to a proper understanding of the church is its accommodation to *bureaucratic organization*. Bureaucracy is a system of administration marked by anonymity, adherence to fixed rules, hierarchy of authority, and the proliferation of officials. The ultimate in modern bureaucracy is the reduction of relationships between people to communication with a machine. The church is subject, like all organizations, to bureaucratic pressures. Out of forgetfulness of its own essence, the church attempts to mimic the organizational structures and managerial techniques of profitable corporations. When the church succumbs to these pressures, it loses its true identity and its distinctive mission in the world.<sup>6</sup>

By implication, Migliore suggests other models may be more compatible with the life and mission of the church. So how about a jazz group as our model? As Christians, we worship a God who is known as the Creator, an imaginative artist who made heaven and earth. We are witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, where we have seen the divine power that creates new possibilities in places of despair. We trust in the Holy Spirit, the One who is as unfettered as the wind, breathing new speech and inspiring new activity.

So why not an artistic model for our working together? Artists are creative. They are concerned with expressing something that is congruent with their deepest feelings and insights. They believe in involving the whole person, joining one’s gifts with a sense of vocation, building something beautiful where formerly nothing existed. In many artistic media, artists tend to work alone and collaborations are few. But not in the world of music.

Consider the jazz quartet. In one of its classical forms—saxophone, piano, bass, and drums—the jazz quartet holds great promise as a constructive model for Christian coworkers. The model is collaborative and collegial without becoming entangled; connects tasks and process, efficiency and emotional fulfillment; creates results greater than the sum of its individual efforts; is genuinely needful and appreciative of each member’s gifts and abilities; encourages freedom and interrelated effort; has a clarity of purpose (e.g., to

<sup>6</sup> Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 187.

create and spontaneously compose music); leads to a public performance that embodies its purpose; and, lastly, assumes that everyone in the group is capable of performing with a common level of competence.

That is a pretty good way of "doing church." The apostle Paul uses the image of the human body in discussing the baptized community and the gifts of its members. I prefer to think in terms of a jazz quartet. Within the group, each gifted musician has a role. The bass player provides a swinging foundation, stating the harmony and establishing the pulse. The drummer keeps the fire stoked, reinforcing the rhythm and provoking the others to a continuing dialogue. A piano player can play the melody, as others can, but in a quartet like this, the pianist enriches the harmony with well-punctuated chords. The saxophonist sets the melody, then members of the whole group begin to spin creative variations on the tune.

As with a church staff, the more players involved, the more structured the musical arrangement needs to be. A trio of piano, bass, and drums will improvise more freely and enjoy greater fluidity in roles. A nineteen-piece big band, on the other hand, must restrict its members to carefully crafted arrangements, where the health of the organization relies on each player's ability to stick to his or her part. Even then, something marvelous can happen: strangers start working together. As musician Stephen Nachmanovitch writes:

Shared art-making is, in and of itself, the expression of, the vehicle for, and the stimulus to human relationships. The players, in and by their play, build their own society. As a direct relationship between people, unmediated by anything other than their imaginations, group improvisation can be a catalyst to powerful and unique friendships. This is an intimacy that cannot be reached through words or deliberation, resembling in many ways the subtle, rich, and instantaneous communication between lovers.<sup>7</sup>

Nachmanovitch compares this to the phenomenon called "entrainment." Entrainment is the occasion when two or more different rhythms become a single pulse. Say, for instance, a group of people are hammering shingles on a roof. After a few minutes, their various poundings fall into the same rhythm—and they never need to talk about it.

There are implications for Christian leadership in such a model. First, a leader recognizes that a community has more gifts than an individual. In God's holy economy, everybody has something to offer. Second, sometimes a leader must get out of the way and let other people do what they do best. We

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Nachmanovitch, *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1990), 99.



honor the Giver of every gift by giving up all pretenses of group control. In his autobiography, jazz great Miles Davis wrote,

That was my gift, you know, having the ability to put certain guys together that would create a chemistry and then letting them go; letting them play what they knew, and above it. I didn't know exactly what they would sound like together when I first hooked up guys. But I think it's important to pick intelligent musicians because if they're intelligent and creative then the music can really fly.<sup>8</sup>

A jazz quartet gives an opportunity for each player to improvise and express some individual creativity. Yet group discipline will not permit one musician to remain the soloist to the exclusion of others. Everyone in the band is given a turn to contribute. When competitiveness seeps in, it is always in the form of playful encouragement. "Come on," a musician will say, "play some music!"

For what it matters, tunes played this way tend to last longer than commercial songs that are aimed for the airwaves. If the tune catches a band's imagination, the band may play for ten or twelve minutes before stopping. The leader's role is to pick the tunes, set the tempo, and get out of the way. This can only happen when the leader dares to trust everybody else. And if this should happen, work becomes like play. Nachmanovitch observes,

Beyond the aesthetic surprises we can find in our own exploration of our craft, we join in community with others and respond to each other, thanks to the power of listening, watching, sensing. The shared reality we create brings up even more surprises than our individual work. In playing together there is real risk of cacophony, the antidote to which is discipline. But this need not be the discipline of mutual awareness, consideration, listening, willingness to be subtle. Trusting someone else can involve gigantic risks, and it leads to the even more challenging task of learning to trust yourself. Giving up some control to another person teaches to give up some control to the unconscious.<sup>9</sup>

Can you imagine music like this? Can you imagine a church that works like this? Only if God is God, and only if we relinquish all pretense and abandon all rigidity. Where did we ever get the idea that pews should be nailed to the floor? Why did we ever allow preachers (like myself!) to imply that worship should overdose on words? How did we ever develop forms of ministry that

<sup>8</sup> Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 399.

<sup>9</sup> Nachmanovitch, *Free Play*, 96.

actually quench the Holy Spirit? Maybe the one thing most needful for us is to repent. To turn around. To come home. To fall in love with the One who first loved us. God's new song can change us—provided we are willing to be changed.

Tonight's jazz combo has led worship services in churches around the northeast. From the vantage point of a piano bench, I have enjoyed watching people's expressions when they enter the sanctuary and discover what is happening. A few folks look shocked or confused but it isn't long before the great majority of people grin widely and even break into laughter. By the benediction, almost all are tapping their toes to the glory of God. And these people are Presbyterians—go figure! The presence of lively, swinging music in worship has a profound impact on people. Many come to a jazz service out of curiosity and depart as converts. Invariably someone asks, "Can you do this again next week?" They sense something has happened. In the words of Karl Barth, they perceive that "in this congregation the work of the Holy Spirit becomes an event."<sup>10</sup>

Can it happen? Can we let the new song of heaven ring out here on earth? Can we recalibrate our hearts and minds in order to hear the music that God makes possible?

I don't know; and ultimately it may not matter. The new song we strive to hear is a tune that will ultimately swallow us up. For it was, it is, and it ever shall be a song of praise. What is the chief end of man, woman, child, and beast? *Doxology!*

Isaiah has no doubt about it. We hear it in the opening verses:

Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the end of the earth! Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants. Let the desert and its towns lift up their voice . . . let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy, let them shout from the tops of the mountains. Let them give glory to the LORD, and declare his praise in the coastlands.

Lesslie Newbigin has observed that the first mark of God's faithful people in a dangerous, dreary, postmodern world is that they are a people of praise. This will be, he notes,

its most distinctive character. Praise is an activity which is almost totally absent from 'modern' society. . . . The Christian congregation is a place where people find their true freedom, their true dignity, and their true

<sup>10</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Harper Torch-books, 1959), 143.

equality in reverence to One who is worthy of all the praise that we can offer.<sup>11</sup>

We are baptized and we belong to God. There is no prior claim upon our lives, no other voice that deserves our attention, no other lover who deserves our obedience. "We are God's people, and the sheep of God's pasture" (Ps. 100:3). Therefore, "all people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice; Him serve with mirth."

A faithful life begins and ends with the praise of God. In praise, we cut ourselves loose from all that enslaves or destroys. We give ourselves to the God who sets us free and never lets us go.

We gather this week to "sing a new song to the Lord." If we can hear the tune, if we can learn the notes, if we can sing the lyric, we will discover that our final destination is to arrive at the Source of our life. Our purpose is to praise the God from whom all things were made and in whose purposes all things shall be redeemed.

To that end, let everything that has life and breath praise the Lord!

<sup>11</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 227-28.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Capps, Donald. *Men, Religion, and Melancholia: James, Otto, Jung, and Erikson*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997. Pp. xiii + 235. \$27.50.

Donald Capps, William Harte Felmeth Professor of Pastoral Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, has written a tour de force in the psychology of religion. His book lifts pastoral theology and practice to a new plateau of enlightened thought. This major work goes to the heart of religious vocation in general and, in particular, to the life blood of personal spiritual growth. The shadow of depression, or melancholy in life, is the key. Capps argues that melancholy, or the kind of chronic depression that is associated "not only with sadness but also with deep negative emotions of rage, fury, and even hate," is the core experience of persons engaged in a life of the spirit. Hardly something to be dismissed by means of referring people with depression to psychiatrists, the melancholy that Capps identifies is shown to be a foundation of all effective pastoral care and practice. The best pastor is the one who has attended to melancholy in his or her own life. How is this done? The key is to turn the darkness of despair into an experientially enhanced worldview, one that enlarges living. Each of the four men analyzed by Capps accomplished such a spiritual transformation of the self. They reframed their melancholy and became exemplary "wounded healers." Indeed, much of the academic discipline of the psychology of religion itself, argues the author, is a constructive expression of melancholy in human life.

Capps identifies this process of melancholic wounding and healing that feeds the spiritual life in four key texts that have become central in the psychology of religion. These are William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* (1917), Carl Jung's *Answer to Job* (1952), and Erik Erikson's *Young Man Luther* (1958). Capps shows, with detailed scholarly evidence, gifted analytical deftness, and compelling argumentation, how all four men managed melancholy, and how their mature psychological and religious thought stemmed from both failures and successes in their struggles. He astutely identifies traces of autobiographical evidence of melancholy in each author's text. The evidence points to a greater than usual and anxious nostalgia for the lost mother of infancy that preoccupied all four men. This felt sense of loss, which each author perceived during boyhood to be irrevocable, was the origin of their dispositions to be religious: "precisely because the boy becomes aware of this deep rage within him, he knows there

is some 'fault' that underlies his life which is deeper than his moral determination to be 'good' can ever penetrate." Being duty-bound or moralistic hardly corrects this basic sense of inner fault. No mother is perfect, as these boys came to regret with unusual anxiety. Mothers can only be good enough at best, but they also can be far worse. Warm emotional bonding and positive self-esteem hardly result from physical and emotional care that is irregular, neglectful, absent, or abusive. Each author compensated for such trauma (actual or perceived) and mostly healed their narcissistic wounds of childhood: James "turned his attention to nature," which was not only threatening but also "animistically alive"; Otto's memory of his mother was brought back to him "by experiences of the 'numinous,' " which, however, he understood to be forms of self-punishment; Jung was consoled by the "biblical text" of the book of Job in which a "restorative spiritual world" exists; and, Erikson also turned to a "biblical text" which was a consoling "maternal matrix" and a source of myths of reconciliation between a "mother and child." In such compensations, personalities undergo re-centerings: the unconscious preoccupations of each man to construct an idealized perfect mother were scripted, rehearsed and, eventually, turned into a spiritual quest. Thus, their eyes soon opened to things unseen. What each man created expressed in scholarly terms a bona fide religious worldview. Each constellated a cosmos befitting contemporary times.

It is too much, writes Capps, to expect a melancholic to turn from an "unseen world" and become committed to "reality testing," even though this may well be "the healthiest" solution available to him. Unlike most other individuals, the melancholic needs to be religious, one who needs the compensation of projecting and entering into an "unseen world." According to Capps, "if religion has a constructive role to play in the mitigation of the pain and distortions of melancholia, it needs to be as 'internal' as the roots of melancholia itself. The image of Jesus," Capps continues, "may well be an answer, especially if, as Erikson suggests, Jesus is, in his bearing and voice, uncannily reminiscent of the missing mother." Jesus' eyes must be followed to his mother, his consoling witness at Calvary. Religion serves as a "stand-in for the mother, or for the son's relationship to his mother," and there is a "pre-historic core" from this relationship "within his mature views on religion." To retrieve this pre-historic core in the context of seeing into an unseen world, one must convert vision into a source of basic trust in the universe. Without such vision, which is much more than mere sight, a genuine spiritual life and fellowship with the faithful are not possible. Capps



offers the insight that James, Otto, Jung, and Erikson each had inklings of seeing the lost mother face-to-face, so to speak. Their theoretical visions for the psychology of religion followed suit. Each religious thinker succeeded in part to develop a psychological strategy that was aimed at correcting or making up for a profound sense of fault felt in their lives, to which their exceedingly anxious nostalgia for the lost and idealized perfect mother was testimony.

While the mother is essential in the life of the melancholic, what of fathers? There is "little evidence" to suggest that James, Otto, Jung, and Erikson "idealized their fathers as young boys" and this made them "more vulnerable to the sadnesses and rages they felt toward their mothers." Capps suggests that a "father surrogate" could have alleviated melancholia in the lives of these men. Fathers and father figures offer alternatives to mothers, something on the order of a "male womb," or an emotional "safe haven," that goes to the center of a boy's psyche. At the end of his book, Capps shows how a father surrogate may offset, even preclude, destructive melancholia. Cited is one of the "most celebrated and poignant friendships" in English letters, that of Samuel Johnson and his chronicler, James Boswell, both of whom suffered from melancholy or "vexing thoughts," and spoke about it to each other over several decades. We learn from this relationship how the melancholic can easily become the alcoholic, as Boswell's life suggests. We also learn from both friends how intergenerational masculine bonds may often mitigate the downward spiral that depression and drink so often set in motion, perhaps as a false search for the lost and idealized perfect mother. Capps shows how men transform destructive melancholia into positive spiritual awareness, which is pastoral ministry at its best.

Ministry is about the turnover of generations, or how "good news" is passed on from one generation to the next by a succession of apostles, including today's clergy. The torments suffered by James, Otto, Jung, and Erikson are indeed apostolic. Capps suggests how these men and others remain spiritual mentors, guiding the "inner work" that needs doing by a learned clergy for generations to come. If people engage in such inner work in the name of their apostolic faith, then only benefit is likely from repeated engagements with this powerful book, itself a guide to creative living and spiritual growth in the service of others.

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Douglass, Jane Dempsey, and James F. Kay, eds. *Women, Gender, and Christian Community*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997. Pp. xiii + 150. \$15.00.

In *Women, Gender, and Christian Community*, thirteen members of the Princeton Theological Seminary faculty reflect on the touchpoints between gender issues and their scholarship. The editors, Jane Dempsey Douglass (History) and James F. Kay (Homiletics and Liturgies), state in their preface that for too long women have borne the primary responsibility for pressing the church to address gender issues. The purpose of this book is to encourage women and men to join together in conversation about gender and Christian faith, for both share insight into and responsibility for this conversation.

The book is structured in two parts, "Reading Scripture through the Lens of Gender Issues" and "Gender Issues in the Life of the Christian Community." This interdisciplinary approach is refreshing and lends new perspectives to these enduring questions. For instance, the opening chapter of the book, "Imagining God," by Patrick D. Miller (Old Testament) examines the current debate about the use of feminine images and language for God. A subsequent chapter by Paul Rorem (History), "Lover and Mother: Medieval Language for God and the Soul," explores feminine and masculine language for God used by male and female writers of the Middle Ages. The effect of this juxtaposition is to allow the past to instruct the present and to reduce the perceived threat of imagining God in the feminine. There are many other crosscurrents between the various chapters. The book reads as if its contributors are engaging not only their scholarship but also one another, thereby modeling the very conversation that the editors hope to foster.

Many writers share concrete stories from their teaching or personal lives that have forced them to examine gender issues in their scholarship. Lenora Tubbs Tisdale of the preaching faculty shares the troubling experience of working with capable women students who nevertheless are plagued by feelings of self-doubt in the pulpit. Tisdale observes that the church tends to view women's preaching as "experimental" rather than normative and then explores the differences between male and female patterns of communication that may contribute to these value judgments. This blending of experience and theological reflection encourages readers to ponder their own experiences of gender issues in the church and offers a faithful landscape into which readers might place them.

The breadth of issues touched upon in this book is wide and will resonate with students, faculty, clergy, and laity alike. Additional themes include: the

image of Sophia in scripture, clergy sexual misconduct, women's ordination, gender and spiritual formation, baptism, and motherhood and vocation. Surprisingly, while the trinitarian formula "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" is mentioned, there is not a thorough treatment of it or the matrix of issues it raises in the church today. It is also striking that while there are three chapters offered by Old Testament scholars there is no chapter from a New Testament faculty member. A final critique is the fact, which the editors and this reviewer regret, that a womanist or *mujerista* voice is not present in the volume. However, Katharine Doob Sakenfeld's chapter, "Deborah, Jael, and Sisera's Mother: Reading the Scriptures in Cross-Cultural Context," does offer powerful testimony from an Old Testament scholar on the importance of cross-cultural conversations around gender and scripture.

Scattered throughout the book are references to the "Re-imagining Conference," the response to which revealed the church's need to attend to gender issues. Whether one was in the center of the maelstrom that followed this gathering or on the sidelines, this book will afford insights into the many questions it raised. *Women, Gender, and Christian Community* is an invaluable conversation partner for men and women who are willing to accept the challenge and reap the blessings of moving gender issues from the margins to the center of dialogue in their communities of faith. With courage and clarity the several authors have committed their minds, hearts, and faith to this end. May we all be so bold.

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Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*. Trans. Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. Pp. xxi + 390. \$28.00.

In this fifth volume of "systematic contributions to theology," Moltmann returns to the eschatological themes of his formative *Theology of Hope* that have been latent in the subsequent work of one for whom eschatology is the organizing center of Christian thought and action. But in *The Coming of God* Moltmann engages the subject in the detail associated with dogmatic inquiry, taking up such standard questions as "Where are the dead?"; "immortality of the soul or resurrection of the body?"; "Is death the consequence of sin?"; "Is the millennium historical?"; and so forth. As in all his writing, the answers to these questions are never separated from their ethical import. For example,

"The person who forgets the rights of the dead will be indifferent toward the life of his or her children too." Sound eschatology is not escapism from today's political, social, and economic issues, but rather the partnership of "hope and resistance."

"The coming of God" in this work is not only a method to engage in a social/political/ecclesiastical critique of all givens, the radical *adventus* juxtaposed to a conservative *futurum* as in Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*, but further entails a sketching of the outlines of the Kingdom-to-come: "Christian eschatology teaches hope not only for the soul . . . but also for the body; not only for the individual but also for the community; not only for the church but also for Israel; not only for human beings but also for the cosmos." This "feast of eternal joy" is not just life in "the world beyond . . . it is an awakening, a rebirth, already here and now, and the endowment of earthly life with new vital energies."

Moltmann's picture of the coming "fulness of God" develops by exegesis of the varied "biblical traditions," and in relation to alternative scenarios from both within and without the church, a mysterious solidarity of the dead with Christ *contra* purgatory, soul sleep, reincarnation, or annihilation; an "eschatological millenarianism" that understands the ambiguities of history but lives and struggles in the light of the Not Yet *contra* the "epochal millenarianism" of the Enlightenment, the "political millenarianism" of a triumphalist America, or the "ecclesiastical millenarianism" of Rome; a Reformed eschatology of transformation but one enriched by a Lutheran theology of the cross and an Orthodox theology of deification; an appreciation for the this-worldly concerns of ecofeminism but a rejection of its pantheist solution; a dialogue with Freud and a distinction between genuine mourning (as in the growing support group movement) and melancholia; and, a questioning of "the end of history" eschatologies from Alexandre Kojève to Francis Fukuyama.

This is a great work, reaching the profundity of Moltmann's *The Crucified God*. Questions, of course, can be raised. While Moltmann aligns himself with Barth on issues of *apokatastasis*, his conclusion sounds less like Barth's nuanced "article of hope" that leaves God the freedom to decide (cf. *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1) than an article of faith which assumes that God in Christ grants "a general pardon." Also, the searching comments on the eschatological divine judgment on "murderers and the children of Satan" as "transformative" rather than retributive would have benefited from a conversation with the long tradition of postmortem "divine perseverance" and exegesis of 1 Peter 3 and 4. Last, as there are many parallels to the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr

("danger grows with the growth of power"), it is regrettable that Niebuhr is absent as an interlocutor.

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Cowdell, Scott. *Is Jesus Unique?: A Study of Recent Christology*. New York: Paulist Press, 1996. Pp. 455. \$24.95.

In this reworked doctoral thesis, Cowdell intends to provide a comprehensive survey of christological trends in our era of "convulsive change"—from the mid-1960s to the early 90s. The time has arrived, he explains, when any credible Christian theology must take into account the global context of world religions and the plurality of radically different cultures (a consideration that in some postmodern philosophies has led to a new epistemological agnosticism). Cowdell is determined to focus on one issue within the bewildering diversity of theologies: in what sense, if any, does a theologian consider Jesus unique and unsurpassable? By presenting an array of significant theologians' answers to this question, Cowdell hopes to provide a general introduction to their respective christologies as well.

He divides these theologians into four groups: "conservatives," "idealists," "liberals," and "radicals." The conservatives (Jürgen Moltmann, Thomas F. Torrance, D. M. MacKinnon, Colin Gunton, Hans Frei, and Dietrich Ritschl) argue for Jesus' uniqueness from revelation itself without an explicit analysis of the human condition that revelation addresses. The "idealists" (Karl Rahner, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Walter Kasper) find Jesus' uniqueness in a correlation between a metaphysically understood universal human nature and Jesus Christ as God's overwhelming fulfillment of this nature. The "liberal" theologians (Piet Schoonenberg, John A. T. Robinson, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Hans Küng), unlike the first two groups, establish Jesus' uniqueness by showing a correlation between the cumulative historical evidence about Jesus and the empirically established "constants" of human experience. The "radicals" (Dennis Nineham, John Bowden, Maurice Wiles, Frances Young, John Hick, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Paul F. Knitter, Don Cupitt, and George A. Lindbeck), to varying degrees and for different reasons, avoid or reject any uniqueness claim for Jesus.

Cowdell's sympathies lie with the liberal group, and in particular with Schillebeeckx, whose approach he would like to complement with that of F. J. van Beeck, Frei, Ritschl, and Lindbeck. He believes that, beyond learning about the "historical Jesus" and "the constants" of human experience, we



need to participate by faith in the story of Jesus as it is presented in the Gospels. Only then will we experience his unique impact. But the believer, following van Beeck's admonition, should refrain from comparing Jesus to any other major religious figure of history, for such "demeaning" comparison would go directly against the praxis of Jesus himself.

Regarding classification, on what basis are Rahner and Kasper identified as "idealists"? This labeling raises doubts about whether Cowdell really understands transcendental Thomism (whose founder's name he consistently misspells: "Maréchal" instead of "Màrèchal"). Lindbeck would certainly dislike being labeled a "complete relativist." Moreover, why is Moltmann presented as a conservative even though his dependence on Hegelian dialectic (God becoming Trinity in history) distances him considerably from Lutheran orthodoxy? Finally, why does Cowdell ignore feminist christologies and why does he relegate the monumental theological synthesis of Hans Urs von Balthasar to a footnote?

Regarding the uniqueness claim for Jesus, Cowdell rightly admits that such a claim cannot simply be based on the accumulation of historical facts about Jesus and human experience. One must also participate by faith in the Gospel story of Jesus. However, he denies any cognitive value to this participation. Is then our claim based on subjective feeling alone with no reference to reality? The Christian tradition has always maintained that faith is the source of a higher, intuitive knowledge concerning the divine mysteries. What does Cowdell think about this issue? Is the "objective" knowledge of the historian ("objective," as Cowdell uses it, reveals a primitive Enlightenment notion of historiography!) the most reliable tool for knowing the real Jesus, or is it mere preparation for the deeper and more comprehensive grasp of faith? I have found no answer to these questions in the book. In summary, in spite of partially helpful insights, Cowdell's work appears to me both confused and confusing.

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DeVries, Dawn. *Jesus Christ in the Preaching of Calvin and Schleiermacher*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996. Pp. x + 115. \$15.00.

Published in the "Columbia Series in Reformed Theology," this brief volume has been adapted from the author's earlier doctoral dissertation, originally submitted to the University of Chicago. DeVries is now Associate



Professor of Theology at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia.

At its most focused, DeVries' purpose in this study is to demonstrate that "it is the Christ present in the proclaimed Word (the *Christus praesens*) that is the center of both Calvin's and Schleiermacher's preaching." To the extent that her conscientious and often insightful exposition of a relatively small number of sermons of Calvin and Schleiermacher on the Synoptic Gospels accurately represents their preaching as a whole, the book achieves considerable success in substantiating this specific thesis.

Chapter 3, "Calvin's Sermons on the Synoptic Gospels," works with the limited number of sermons published in the *Corpus Reformatorum* on the Synoptics, focusing of necessity (because of limited extant material) on sermons connected with Jesus' birth and early life, his public ministry, and his death and resurrection. The exposition of the sermons themselves is fresh, well-organized, and illuminating. The author calls attention to the significant emphasis in Calvin on the way effective preaching vividly depicts the living Christ. On a broader level, she illustrates how Calvin's use of various homiletical strategies in his actual preaching aims to render the living Christ truly present in the midst of the worshipping congregation.

In considering Schleiermacher's understanding of the place of the living Christ in preaching, DeVries first provides an insightful and tightly integrated overview of his "theory of religious language," emphasizing its power to enact incarnationally the divine realities it seeks to depict. As the word is presented in preaching, "Christ is realized as immediately present in his entire redeeming and reconciling activity." She concludes that Christ's self-presentation in preaching "changes the individuals to whom it is applied, but also implants a new vital principle into the human race that will eventually transform all of society." This expansive construal of Schleiermacher's theory of preaching is specifically illustrated in the following chapter, which provides perceptive exposition of this theme in specific sermons on the Synoptic Gospels. Clearly, in their shared sense of the immense power of the divine word to convey the preached word and vice versa, DeVries has identified a significant point of continuity between Calvin and Schleiermacher.

Throughout, DeVries helpfully focuses the reader's attention on the parallel ways that both Calvin and Schleiermacher seek to direct preaching towards the presentation of the living Christ. When all is said and done, however, it becomes clear that the modestly stated original thesis is only a small part of what the author wants to address in this slim volume. In the end, DeVries aims at nothing less than persuading the reader that Schleiermacher

is a legitimate—or even perhaps uniquely significant—heir of the Reformed tradition and even that “by placing the sacramental word at the center of his Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology . . . Schleiermacher achieved a significant improvement over Calvin’s systematics.” Readers whose theological commitments remain within “mainstream” Reformed theology may be forgiven if they require a thorough and broadly researched inductive study of both Calvin’s and Schleiermacher’s comprehensive theological writings in all three of these immense areas—rather than a very focused study of sermons on the Synoptic Gospels—before conceding this point. One key concern throughout the study is that at various points, the author reveals a profound suspicion towards the concrete contextuality of history as such; a position in tension with recent trends in both historical and constructive theology. This suspicion is evident not only in her explicit anxiousness to insulate the gospel from history in the realm of christology but also in her apparently unintentional tendency to frame Calvin’s sixteenth-century thought and concerns in the later language and thought-forms of Schleiermacher and his intellectual and cultural milieu. The expansive, quasi-mystical use of the term *Christus praesens* to encompass Calvin’s understanding of the way the word of God is manifested in preaching sounds a great deal more like early nineteenth-century Germany than sixteenth-century Geneva. Broader inductive study of Calvin’s own patristically-rooted approach to christology and the word throughout his corpus would have led to a much stronger emphasis on the perichoretic interrelationship of word and Spirit in revelation, scripture, and preaching. This, in turn, would have led to a clearer recognition that in Calvin, the reality (not the idea) of the Holy Spirit is the unity of the *extra nos* and the *in nobis* of the Christian life and of justification and sanctification. DeVries’ perception of a “lack of coherence” at the precise point where Calvin’s theological insight is at its most profound (1559 *Institutes* III:1–3) is one of several instances in which her tendency to read Calvin through later Schleiermacherian lenses hinders her ability to appreciate his distinctive strengths.

A related concern applies to the assumption in chapter 2 that Calvin sees the word “as sacrament.” In his sixteenth-century context, Calvin specifically chose *not* to put things that way because, as he saw it, expansive ideas of “sacramentality” were part of the problematic legacy of medieval theology which he was called to correct. To be sure, word and sacrament “have the same office,” as Calvin says in the epigraph DeVries provides to chapter 2. But Calvin is much more inclined to see the sacraments as expressions of the word than he is to see the word “as sacrament.”

In addition to Reformed theologians, however, the book has additional audiences in view. It is hazardous to guess whether readers drawn to Schleiermacher's theological project will be interested or irritated at the suggestion that his strenuous exertions to formulate fresh, more subjective religious categories for the antitraditional, critically self-conscious "age of Enlightenment" are actually deeply rooted in Calvin's thoroughly traditioned and precritical theological approach. But for a variety of readers who are intrigued by unexpected connections, there is much here to stimulate thought. If pastors will make the effort to read this intellectually challenging but accessible study, they may find themselves preaching (on the authority of both Calvin and Schleiermacher, not to mention the Holy Spirit) with a renewed sense that their purpose "is to mediate a saving encounter with Christ." If they do, its author will have accomplished something very significant. Dare congregations hope with DeVries that this common purpose might consume both Calvinist and Schleiermacherian preachers, and even the majority of us who are somewhere in between?

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Long, Thomas G. *Hebrews*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997. Pp. 153. \$21.00.

This is a commentary for those who cherish preaching or need to, who intone hymns or need to, who treasure the heritage of faith or need to, who abide in the believing community or need to. Tom Long, formerly Professor of Preaching and Worship at Princeton Theological Seminary, finds the core of Hebrews in Christology and symbolism—the cognitive and affective—combined in a homiletical strategy to arouse hope and keep hearers from forsaking their faith. This Christology blends highpriestly images with the "parabola of salvation," that is, Christ's descent and ascent. Long keeps readers in touch with the sermon genre of Hebrews by constantly referring to the "Preacher" rather than to the author. The commentary analyzes orality in Hebrews, listening for parallels, contrasts, repetitions, surprises, foreshadowings, and flashbacks. It also encounters modern readers by juxtaposing interpretations of our situation with interpretations of Hebrews. It hears hymns in Hebrews but repeatedly sings hymns in echo of Hebrews. It focuses on the threat in Hebrews of exhausted believers drifting away but aims at

modern believers who are in similar jeopardy. It grants communal hearing priority over individual reading for the ancient audience of Hebrews but challenges readers also to hear Hebrews in the community of faith.

The commentary interprets Hebrews as an oral event on the basis not merely of its sermonic genre but also its content. Long contrasts, homiletically, what can only be heard with what cannot be seen. Though Long himself also recognizes the vision of faith, readers might question whether hearing and seeing are antithetical in Hebrews. Is hearing not for seeing? Hebrews sees beyond conventional vision, peering into heaven to see Jesus at the right hand of God (1:13; 2:9; 10:12). Moreover, is there not a difference between what cannot be seen and what we do not *yet* see (2:9)?

Against notions that Hebrews is anti-Jewish and supercessionistic, Long pastorally emphasizes continuity between divine promises to Israel and fulfillment in Jesus. Rather than pit Hebrews against the heritage of Israel, Long links Hebrews into its own great chain of people of faith from all ages. Though Long notes that divine promises include Abrahamic promises, he opts not for specific promises but for the general characterization of God as a God of promise. But does this do Hebrews justice? Since Hebrews draws on tradition, the Abrahamic promise is prominent even when not explicit. For example, as heir of all things, Jesus is an Abrahamic heir (1:2).

Long has written this commentary in rare style—vivid, imagistic, profound, provocative, poignant (“God’s race is not the Olympics; it is the Special Olympics”). Those who use this commentary will garner readings that are integrated with the creeds of faith, the life of the church, and the scriptural canon. Cases of the last occur when Long fills in gaps from the Gospels where Hebrews hardly mentions the historical Jesus. The commentary admirably fulfills its intention to be faithful to the text and useful for the church. It will interest New Testament scholars because it offers innovative readings, though they will miss engagement with the likes of Otto Michel, Otto Kuss, Herbert Braun, and Albert Vanhoye. Still, this is primarily a commentary by a preacher, about preaching (canonical and contemporary), and for preachers.

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González, Catherine Gunsalus, and Justo L. González. *Revelation*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997. Pp. x + 149. \$16.00.

The preface indicates that this book is part of a series oriented specifically to “lay women and men . . . who find themselves called to the service of



teaching." If I were asked by a church-school teacher for a book to help both teacher and class make contemporary sense of Revelation, this slender volume would be among my top two or three recommendations—perhaps in first place. It is written by capable scholars but not as a contribution to the scholarly discussion. It provides reliable information, presented simply and clearly to a nonexpert readership in a warmly positive and edifying manner. The method and conclusions represent centrist critical scholarship, without going into the relatively minor points over which scholars argue. Revelation was written in apocalyptic language with a message for its own time, and does not predict the long-range future. The authors do not hesitate to declare that "John was wrong on the crucial matter of timing." Though not predicting our time, Revelation has a message for contemporary Christian believers.

Several issues that have played a prominent role in the history of interpretation, and that still loom large in the sensationalizing approaches to Revelation (including the meaning of "666" in 13:18 and "Harmagedon" in 16:16) are considered as unsolvable, not important for contemporary meaning anyway, and thus practically ignored. The original readers understood their relevance for their time, but we later readers no longer know the situation well enough to be sure what these enigmatic terms meant then. While the more inquiring reader (who can be referred to more detailed commentaries) may be disappointed by the skimpy treatment of such traditional cruxes of interpretation, such a procedure is both true to the nature of real letters and illustrates that this type of question is not necessary to get the main message of the document.

This generalizing approach, minimizing the importance of the details of critical studies, can have a downside, as when the question of whether Revelation was written by the apostle John or not is dismissed "since it has little influence on the meaning of the book or how we interpret it." Likewise, Revelation's presentation of the Roman Empire in demonic terms is explained too easily, such that it was a good government in the 60s when Paul wrote Romans 13, but in the meantime had been taken over by a demonic force, as though the difference between Romans 13 and Revelation 13 were only a matter of chronology. Nero was on the throne when Paul wrote Romans, and 1 Peter's positive view of the state was written about the same time as Revelation. Revelation's demonic empire is expressed in terms of Nero *redivivus*. Thus, the differing evaluations of the state in the New Testament ought not to be reduced to chronology alone.

One of the numerous strengths of the book is the perspective the authors bring to it. Both are specialists in church history and both have a perspective



on the world at large that is broader than North American biblical scholarship in general tends to be. Revelation is seen through eyes that are focused by a more global, and more centuries-long perspective than is usually the case, revealing dimensions in the text apt to be missed by those whose perspective is narrower and shorter. Nonetheless, it is to be questioned whether John himself was preparing readers "to be ready for the long haul."

The authors have provided us with a helpful textbook that in general is faithful to the ancient meaning and makes its contemporary relevance transparent, without either claiming that Revelation is predicting our own time or providing complex hermeneutical discussions on how to bridge the gap between the first and the twentieth centuries. This is no mean accomplishment, and we may be grateful for the product.

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Anderson, Herbert, and Freda A. Gardner. *Living Alone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997. Pp. 140. \$13.00.

In a society consumed with "family values," the simple fact is that more and more people are living alone. This clearly written book is at once pastoral, practical, and reflective. It provides valuable insights for pastors and church leaders who attempt to respond to the changing needs of American society. *Living Alone* is the fifth and final volume in the "Family Living in Pastoral Perspective" series. Each volume is coauthored by Herbert Anderson, a Lutheran pastor who is Professor of Pastoral Theology at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago. He brings to these volumes his insights from the pastoral care and counseling field. Coauthor Freda Gardner, the Thomas W. Synnott Professor of Christian Education Emerita at Princeton Theological Seminary, contributes a lifetime of theological and practical reflection on congregational ministry.

The title of the book is quite precise: the authors are interested in the issues involved in "living alone," not simply "being single." Thus,

living alone has objective and subjective meaning. Objectively, it means that the space one calls home is occupied by only one person. The subjective experience of living alone means to be without someone who is consistently involved in the ordinary and extraordinary decisions of daily living.

The authors acknowledge that those living alone represent a wide variety of

ages and stages in adult development, from young people alone in a new job in a new city to those who live by themselves in a retirement complex or care facility. Specific attention is given to situations such as living alone after divorce, the death of a spouse, or the departure of children; always living alone; and situations in which one is married but, for all practical purposes, lives alone (e.g., commuter marriage or long-term hospitalization of a spouse).

One of the real contributions Anderson and Gardner make is to put the issue of living alone in a theological context. In the opening chapter, they argue that humans were created by God for relationships. Thus, the problem for many people is: can one live alone and be whole? To pose the question in this way, however, suggests that living with others automatically puts one into relationships that contribute to one's wholeness. We know (and so do the authors) that living in broken relationships can be a devastating experience. The problem is not the notion that God has created persons for relationship, but to take this as the only starting point risks confirming the misperception that living arrangements correlate with relatedness.

A more satisfactory theological view is found later in the chapter on solitude and friendship. Here, the authors come the closest to addressing all persons, whether living alone or with others. All of us face the reality of loneliness and isolation. One of the most significant stages of personal development recognizes the need for solitude: space and time in which to meet oneself and to meet God. Quotations from Merton, Nouwen, and others confirm that meaningful relationships with others in fact grow out of the soil of true solitude in which one confronts the transcendent presence of God. This might have made a stronger introduction to the topic, although it does make a strong conclusion.

*Living Alone* closes with an excellent chapter dealing with its implications for congregational ministry. Discussion of this book in a study group or mission committee could prove to be instructional and supportive as the church ministers to those who look to it as a place to experience love for God and neighbor.

Cynthia M. Campbell  
McCormick Theological Seminary

Augsberger, David W. *Helping People Forgive*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996. Pp. x + 180. \$17.00.

After a long period of emphasis on liberation, breaking out of molds, and assertiveness—which sometimes seemed to leave the relational chips to fall where they may—forgiveness is again enjoying popularity as a topic among

pastoral writers. David W. Augsberger comes by his interest in forgiveness naturally, as an "Anabaptist in heritage and commitment." He sees forgiveness as a key element in reconciliation and community bridge building—his main interest. Augsberger does not provide a definition of forgiveness but rather various metaphors, models, and images. These fall along a continuum from unilateral to mutual forgiveness, the latter of which he champions as superior in furthering reconciliation. He engages "a fresh trail of metaphors," based on the theorizing of Melanie Klein, Heinz Kohut, Murray Bowen, René Girard, Alasdair MacIntyre, John Howard Yoder, and Stanley Hauerwas; he hopes this trail will lead to a new shift in paradigms.

Unfortunately, this trail also makes it difficult to say what is really central to Augsberger's new model. Most of the theorizing deals with elements in human nature that give rise to the need for something like forgiveness, rather than forgiveness as such. Perhaps the closest he comes to describing a new model of forgiveness is his insistence that a full forgiveness, as opposed to various partial ones, comes only with mature awareness of one's own inner sense of badness brought on in early childhood. "As a person learns to deal with the bad objects within, bad objects in others become less troublesome." Empathy based on inner awareness then becomes the vehicle of forgiveness. A part of this inner awareness is also based on learning to mourn childhood losses—the basis of adult mourning—which he terms "foregrieving," that is, the gradual giving up of anger and resentment over these losses. This model is based largely on the work of Melanie Klein, the pioneer psychoanalytic object-relations theorist.

In a book that is certainly theory laden, I should have appreciated more attention to the question of how these various theorists may be related. Can Murray Bowen and René Girard (the latter of whom believes that most violent human activity stems from mimetic desire, or envy) really be comfortable with Freudian dual-drive theorist Melanie Klein, whose speculative theorizing about the first few months of life has long been rejected as implausible, even by many of her object-relations colleagues? It happens that I too think that Klein has some important things to offer us, but I also think that Augsberger owes his readers at least an acknowledgement that her work has been extremely controversial, even among her associates (e.g., John Bowlby).

Although we may agree with Augsberger that full awareness mutual forgiveness in community is ideal, it is not altogether clear what he thinks of partial forgiveness scenarios, in which there may be extenuating circumstances or ignorance, or even denial of any need for forgiveness on the part of a perpetrator. Neither does he give a clear answer to the question of whether

forgiveness is always warranted. The tenor of his discussion seems to say yes, but at one point he says "no," quoting Nietzsche. Since less than ideal situations are by far the most common, it would have been helpful to have had more light on this question.

These things having been said, I also must say that this volume will reward the reader who seeks to be better informed about the human issues involved in the central Christian doctrine of forgiveness as well as in its pastoral dimensions.

James N. Lapsley  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Neuger, Christie Cozad, and James Newton Poling, eds. *The Care of Men*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997. Pp. 254. \$18.95.

Pastoral care of men? It must be an oxymoron, given the persistent stereotype of men as the sturdy ones, those who take charge and take care of others. Aren't men in the church like men elsewhere—the doers, the providers, the managers? Others are the needy ones, not us men. A men's group in a church may focus on conviviality or on service; but as a support group? Hardly; it is a man's duty to support others. And how many men can you picture sitting still for pastoral counseling—especially when the pastor these days may be a woman!

Such stereotypes are just that, of course, stereotypes that are exactly the problem that exacerbates men's need for pastoral care. Men do share the full range of human plights and dilemmas, griefs and hopes, doubts and fears, raging, and all the rest. And men also bear distinct burdens in our culture as men, as pastors and pastoral care literature have begun to recognize over the past decade or so.

What pastoral care issues do men confront as men? There are two types: First, there are the chronic, often hidden issues such as those just alluded to, the burdens of exaggerated responsibility and duty, preoccupation with accomplishment and control, lofty aspirations and hopes, taboos on dependence and vulnerability—all the characteristics demanded of men in our culture. These are the problems of being a man whether or not there is any such thing as a women's movement. (The relation, if any, of these issues to the women's movement is that men may be encouraged and guided to raise their own consciousness about such issues by the example women have set.)

Second, there is a range of more acute, more conspicuous issues that *are* triggered by women and the women's movement, such issues as sharing



power, control of violence and abuse, changing roles and gender relationships—the issues of how to live in a world in which women have changed, issues more at the frontier where ethical and pastoral concerns blend. This second set of issues—issues in which women *are* setting the agenda—is the context out of which this book developed, deliberately symbolized by the more or less equal sharing between genders in its planning, editing, and writing. More satisfactory partnership with women is the most prominent pastoral goal in this volume, especially in the general chapters by the editors (who serve on the faculties of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities and of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, respectively), by James Poling's chapter on violence, by Joretta Marshall's analysis of on-the-job relations, and by Toinette Eugene's biting reflections on the Million Man March.

But the women's movement is not the exclusive context and gender partnership is not the only goal. A probing and skillful chapter by Judith Orr on working class men, two other chapters on African-Americans by Donald Matthews and Edward Wimberly, and a thorough and moving chapter by Randle Mixon on gay men highlight the thwarting impact of class, race, and sexual orientation. In a fitting final chapter to the book, Herbert Anderson explores in a broad developmental perspective men's distinctive and profound "hidden sea of tears" (which should not be mistaken merely for the "expression of feelings" that women request and model, and which has everything to do with the existential fission of infinite hope and finite reality that seems a man's distinctive lot.)

Perhaps the major accomplishment of the book, even more than its analysis, is the rich array of imaginative and sound strategies of pastoral care that emerge in most of the chapters—strategies that, paradoxically, need not be limited to men. Wrestling with the particularities of gender, class, race, and sexual orientation has led the authors to hone methods of pastoral care which may be remarkably sensitive and sensible strategies for the pastoral care of anyone.

James E. Dittes  
Yale University

Boyd, Stephen B., W. Merle Longwood, and Mark W. Muesse, eds. *Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculinities*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996. Pp. xxii + 306. \$29.00.

The plural "masculinities" in the subtitle of this weighty new contribution to gender studies may prove initially disorienting to those used to thinking of



masculinity in more singular, stable, or even objective terms. It underscores its editors' central conviction that men have long been "prone to regard themselves as generic humans rather than gendered persons conditioned by historical and cultural processes." The book attempts to redeem men from both the privilege and burden of this universalizing tendency, particularly with regard to men's religious experiences. Its deconstructive task of emasculating patriarchy's "masquerade as knowledge" is balanced by its more constructive purpose of enabling men, many for the first time, to consider their spiritual sensibilities as specifically male.

Despite inevitable inconsistencies of quality in a thick collection of essays, *Redeeming Men* readily emerges as among the most significant of the recent procession of works in men's studies. Editors Stephen B. Boyd (Wake Forest University), W. Merle Longwood (Siena College), and Mark W. Muesse (Rhodes College), have compiled a savvy volume that lends academic integrity and appropriate complexity to the burgeoning interest in men's spirituality.

The book's twenty-one chapters by twenty-two authors are divided into two major sections, "The Problematics of Masculinity" and "Resources for Reconstructing Manhood," which highlight the collection's twin purposes. These in turn are further divided into six parts: The Dynamics of Power in Shaping Masculine Identity; The Role of Religion in Shaping Masculine Identity; The Role of Masculinity in Shaping Religions; The Effects of Masculinity; Myth, Ritual, Spiritual Discipline, and Community; and Theology and Ethics. Valuable introductory comments by the editors identify key concepts in men's studies, including distinctions between biological or essentialist understandings of maleness and socially constructed masculinities and movements.

The pleasure in reading this book, however, is derived not from its somewhat contrived structure but, on the contrary, from its departure from formulaic ways of construing spirituality evident in a number of the essays, as if classical musicians had been freed for a time to play some jazz. How does one characterize, for example, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz's "God's Phallus and the Dilemmas of Masculinity"—a provocative and theologically rich essay that begins by questioning why Jews and Christians have tended to think of God as Father yet without a penis? How do men compensate, Eilberg-Schwartz wonders, for the inevitably homoerotic implications of relating intimately as males to a God conceived of as male? Even as the symbol of a male God has worked to legitimate masculinity, it simultaneously "renders the meaning of masculinity unstable."

Evelyn A. Kirkley's chapter, "Is It Manly To Be Christian?: The Debate in Victorian and Modern America," raises a similar question to good effect in examining responses throughout the past century of various men's organizations concerned with the integration of masculinity and spirituality. Other chapters explore this integration through the lives of exemplars such as John the Baptist, Martin Luther, and African American activist Howard Thurman, the latter who, in saying that "a person must be at home somewhere before they can be at home anywhere," may well have captured the heart of the masculine spiritual dilemma. In "Male Sexuality and the Fragile Planet: A Theological Reflection," James B. Nelson argues convincingly from the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ for the necessity of a man's claiming his bodily experience in the quest for spiritual maturity: "Matter matters to God."

Like traveling in a strange land, reading *Redeeming Men* proves at once exhilarating and exhausting. Although the book clearly is worth the trip, it sometimes tediously saturates one's pluralistic sensibilities, as when, for example, Seth Mirksy, a journal editor who explicitly claims allegiance to no god, recommends "nourishment and encouragement in the ideas and practices of feminist Witchcraft and other Pagan, nature-oriented traditions." Perhaps changing the book's subtitle to "Religions and Masculinities," with plurals all around, would reflect more accurately its religious spectrum and hint at how sobering our prospects, if left to ourselves, of redeeming men.

Robert C. Dykstra  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Moessner, Jeanne Stevenson, ed. *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. Pp. xvii + 333. \$21.00.

In this collaborative work, eighteen writers present their views on pastoral care from the perspective of advocacy for women. The work as a whole is intended to move from the paradigm of care for women as victims to one of care for women as part of a human web of relationships and wide cultural, social, and religious contexts. Their collective purpose as pastoral counselors, pastors, and academicians is to share their insights with the churches, pastoral guilds, and religious institutions as they look at issues of gender, culture, family, and sexuality. They accomplish this in three parts.

The first part, "The Eyes of Understanding," encompasses a number of contemporary issues in pastoral theology: sexuality, autonomy, "individualism," the care of African-American women, and the care of women as

ministers. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore begins with a balanced, informative "invitation to dialogue" on the gap between the academy and church and the crisis of identity it represents for the field. Expressing what many caregivers discern, feel, and suffer, she argues that "the devaluation of religion and religious institutions in the twentieth century is related to the devaluation of the feminine and the identification of the church with the feminine in its attention to emotion, care, nurture, and religious piety." Miller-McLemore further contends that the "marginalization of the field of pastoral theology and theology more generally is intertwined with this characterization." She discusses both the appeal and the use of psychology in the field as well as both the rationale and the problems with the move away from it.

Carolyn Stahl Bohler offers concrete, balanced guidelines for a practice of "female-friendly pastoral care" using context-appropriate terms that do not pathologize, complicate, or confuse pastoral care with psychotherapy.

Teresa E. Snorton provides the reader with a view into the necessities of caring for African-American women differently from Euro-American women and of reframing the notion of the matriarch so that womanists, young and old, may hope to be understood and helped by our efforts at caregiving.

Miriam Anne Glover-Wetherington takes up pastoral care and counseling with women entering ministry, focusing on social and contextual issues and pointing out the inadequacy of only using theories of intrapsychic experience to explain the complex issue of "the fear of success" in the context of a male-dominated profession.

The second part, "Insights for Pastoral Care," addresses issues of anger, aggression and justice, lesbian identities, women and mother-loss, eating disorders, the impact of hysterectomies and mastectomies on women's identities, surviving rape, and older women's secrets.

Joretta L. Marshall discusses the rights of women who are in the process of coming to terms with their lesbian sexual identities. Her concern is that they get the care they deserve in pastoral care by caregivers who can collaborate with them in communal care and self-care.

Martha Bowman Robbins considers the most formative relationship in the life of every woman—the mother-daughter relationship—and its profound effect on adult women's spirituality, their images of and relationship to God and the church.

In part three, "Visions of Home," the authors treat the spiritual care of women, women's study groups as pastoral counseling, and love defined for women as self-sacrifice and self-denial. In the latter, Brita L. Gill-Austern turns away from the crucifixion as symbol and model of sacrificial love and

looks to the trinity as the premier symbol of self-giving. Finally, Moessner ends the collection powerfully in "From Samaritan to Samaritan." In this essay, she uses the story of the woman in John 4 who, on her journey to and from the well, encountered One who empowered her and to whom she responded by running to her community with such a convincing proclamation that many believed her.

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Doehring, Carrie. *Taking Care: Monitoring Power Dynamics and Relational Boundaries in Pastoral Care and Counseling*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995. Pp. 192. \$16.95.

The novelty of this book by Carrie Doehring, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Psychology at the Boston University School of Theology, is that its "case studies" are not derived from pastor/parishioner or counselor/client relationships but from twentieth-century novels. Noting that most case studies in pastoral care and counseling books tend to give little attention to contextual factors and acknowledging her own potential for describing her clinical work "in a disengaged style in which I am portrayed as superior to my client," Doehring uses fiction to illustrate the power dynamics and relational boundary issues that others have also explored (e.g., James N. Poling in *Abuse of Power* and Larry Kent Graham in *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds*).

Her primary novels are John Updike's *A Month of Sundays*, the daily journal of a Protestant minister confined to a month's residency in a retreat center for clergy sex abusers; Sinclair Ross' *As For Me and My House*, the year-long journal of a minister's wife whose husband begins a sexual involvement with a parishioner; Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the story of a black woman in the post-Civil War South who kills her child as a means to insure that she will not go back to the hell of slavery; and Iris Murdoch's *Nuns and Soldiers*, the story of a former Catholic nun whose spiritual journey and sexual passion are intertwined. In Doehring's view, what one gains from interpreting novels as case studies is that power dynamics and relational boundary issues are contextualized, shown to be embedded in the larger social, political, and cultural dynamics in which the local events depicted in the novel are implicated. Thus, Morrison's story has its locus in an overpowering white, racist society by which its protagonist is threatened and in the disengaged black community that views her action with silent disapproval. By bringing the dead



child back as a living young woman, Morrison envisions the black community as no longer disengaged but empowering.

Doehring's main argument is that the power dynamics and relational boundary issues in human relationships may be understood in terms of five modalities: disengaged, merged, overpowered, empathic, and empowered. She is especially attentive to those moments in human relationships when an empathic dynamic occurs, enabling the participants to move from being disengaged, merged, and/or overpowered to a mutually empowered status. She emphasizes the complexity of disengaged, merged, and overpowered dynamics, noting, for example, that an individual may feel intrapsychically overpowered while behaving interpersonally in an overpowering manner. Thus, awareness of the complexities of power dynamics and related boundary issues is the first step in the monitoring of human relationships and reading novels from the perspective of their power dynamics helps one to develop this awareness.

The first three chapters of the book focus on the novels; chapters 4 and 5 address the power dynamics and relational boundary issues in pastoral care and counseling; chapter 6 focuses on the interaction of power dynamics and relational boundaries in the individual's relationship to God; chapter 7 views sin as disengagement, merger, and power imbalance; and chapter 9 focuses on the monitoring of power dynamics and relational boundaries as a fundamental aspect of pastoral care and counseling. Chapter 8 discusses the uses and potential liabilities of using literature as case studies.

I especially appreciated Doehring's contention, supported by the writings of her Boston University colleague, Chris Schlauch, that empathy is critically important for the empowerment of all the participants in any human relationship. Moreover, she courageously addresses the role of sexual desire in human relationships; her analysis of Murdoch's novel adds an important new dimension to the pastoral care and counseling literature on the power dynamics in gender relations, as this literature has tended to minimize, if not deny, women's sexual desire. However, Murdoch's view (endorsed by Doehring) that sexual passion needs to be spiritually purified is precisely the kind of thinking that clergy sexual abusers exploit. Larry Graham (in the aforementioned book) provides an actual case study of a clergy sexual abuser who purported to be offering his women parishioners a "higher form of spiritual love."

Doehring indicates that she originally approached pastoral situations from the perspective of family systems theory but came to realize that this theory gave inadequate attention to the empowering and disempowering agencies of



the larger society. Readers similarly trained in family systems will find her use of novels provocative and challenging. Those of us who came to pastoral care and counseling via the writings of Erik H. Erikson may need to suppress a tendency to gloat over the fact that the field is finally catching up to us, for Erikson's own case studies were always attentive to this larger social and cultural context. His essays, "The Nature of Clinical Evidence" and "Psychological Reality and Historical Actuality," in *Insight and Responsibility*, would make valuable companion readings to Doehring's text, especially because they provide theoretical support for her case study approach.

My major criticism of the book is that it represents individualism (whether "rugged" or "rampant") as the root cause of just about everything that is wrong with American society today. Individualism fosters isolation and disengagement, it promulgates "the myth of the self-sufficient individual," it keeps company with privatism, Euro-American centrism and "rapacious hedonism" (quoting Cornel West), and is implicated in the dehumanization that is our current form of social slavery. We are even counseled to "beware of a form of individualism based on the idea that each human being has a unique potential." That a single ideology in the midst of so many competing ideologies could wreak so much personal and social havoc is difficult to imagine. In fact, one may argue that traditional (Emersonian) individualism is precisely the ideology to which we might have recourse today for a vision of self-empowerment that does not, as so many other ideologies do, entail the disempowerment of others.

Donald Capps

Princeton Theological Seminary

Bondi, Roberta C. *In Ordinary Time: Healing the Wounds of the Heart*. Nashville: Abdingdon Press, 1996. Pp. 205. \$16.95.

Roberta C. Bondi has written a book that urges one to buy copies to give to friends who are facing difficulties in prayer, who are trying to resolve the pain of past hurts, or who have endured the unexpected death of someone very dear to them. By drawing on the wisdom of the *apophthegmata* (wisdom sayings) of the fourth and fifth-century desert monks, she weaves a message of hope with lessons from her own life into a shawl, with which to cloak the reader in encouragement to persevere in prayer.

The format of the book is a series of letters to a fictional friend. The artificiality of this genre, however, soon gives way to powerful theological reflections and poignant examples offered within each chapter. The central

message about the healing of the heart begins in chapter 1 with the struggle to talk about difficulties in prayer. These difficulties arise, the author maintains, due to "injuries to our ability to love and be loved that need to be healed." As Bondi carefully points out, many Christians have been trained to repent of sinfulness, yet a consequent subtle form of self-judgment seems to drive them away from God and reinforces a sense of helpless guilt, neither of which helps them to pray. The early monastic tradition teaches that the very wounds of anger, fear, envy, or depression prevent one from really knowing and loving God, that is, praying in the awareness that God loves us and has made us in the divine image. The "work" of prayer, then, is the healing process of God's grace, in which the one praying allows, seeks, wrestles with, and lets himself or herself be surprised by God's action in the heart.

In Chapter 2, Bondi offers gentle, humble direction to one undertaking the often ordinary and "un-noble" everyday activity of prayer. The single most important directive is to "show up," that is, to be faithful to the habit of sharing time with God. When the God one has encountered in early life is just too scary for one to feel safe in prayer, she advises that one be gentle and enjoy doing what is comfortable in the presence of God, until one begins to trust God. The rest of the chapter addresses the inner work of facing pain that surfaces when one begins to pray. She draws on her own poignant memories of God's loving her through past pain that invite readers to explore their own stories, where grace awaits discovery in past and present pain. What is striking in this personal exploration is the lack of narcissistic self-preoccupation one encounters. Rather, the reader is inextricably led to an exploration of the mystery of love hidden in the messiness of past memories.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 have intriguing titles: "A Silver Flute," "Dancing Babycakes," and "The Yellow Shirt," respectively. Each image reflects the profound awareness of God's tender love, as the author claimed a lost gift: the playing of a flute; dancing in appreciation of her body; and pondering the sight of a favorite shirt given as a sign of hope for a young man in his last moments of life. At times, one is moved to tears by the tenderness of the author's real life examples. In chapter 5, Bondi portrays a modern parable of a self-righteous Pharisee amid publicans, in which any Christian struggling with hypocrisy cannot avoid seeing themselves. Yet God's love enfolds all equally.

Chapter 6 concludes with mysteries. A story of a remembered conversation between her Uncle Quentin and Aunt Nacky, when Bondi was a child, puts into perspective the haunting question Quentin asks: "Free will or predestination?" Aunt Nacky chooses a third way: "I reckon God knows most of us are

just about doing the best we can do most of the time any way." From her aunt's wisdom, Bondi moves to early church writers, like Augustine, in the discovery that there are three parts to innate religious impulse: desire for goodness, desire for truth, and longing for beauty, that is, the God who is goodness, truth and beauty.

Mary Forman, OSB  
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Richardson, Ronald W. *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1996. Pp. 184. \$15.00.

Richardson is a retired pastor and pastoral counselor with a special interest in family systems theory and its application to churches and congregations. This volume is in the "Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling Series" coedited by Howard Stone and Howard Clinebell. With questions for personal reflection and group discussion at the end of each chapter, it is clearly written for use in study and discussion formats such as adult education. The author applies the popular family systems thinking of the late Murray Bowen to personal life and leadership in congregations, much as the late Edwin Friedman did in 1985 in his widely read and influential *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. Readers who are familiar with Friedman's work will find this volume a somewhat more colloquially written and less extensive version of the same subject, perhaps intended for a less professional audience.

Richardson provides a readable, reliable application of foundational Bowenian family system principles from differentiation, triangulation, enmeshment and the like to personal life and relationships in congregational settings. He constructs two rather ingenious and fictional "case studies" of radically different congregations facing an identical circumstance to illustrate the ways these theoretical points operate. Technical language is reduced to a minimum and the personal vignettes are vivid and realistic. The descriptions of personal emotional development and reactions are particularly clear and informative.

The author attempts to relate his concepts to biblical and theological language, but the result is more a series of biblical/theological analogies and metaphors than theological reflection properly speaking. For instance, identifying "emotional maturity" with what the Bible calls "wisdom" (a typical illustration of the process) may not be inaccurate but it cannot really be said to

be theologically helpful either. Similarly, trying to relate the family systems idea of pursuing and distancing to the imagery found in Ephesians for those who are "near" and those who are "far off," or to the difficulty Jews and Gentiles have accepting each other, while possibly harmless, does not generate great theological insight.

Overall, this is a clearly written, helpful synopsis of an important set of concepts about personal functioning in intimate relationships such as the family, and by metaphoric extension, the larger church "families" we call congregations. Nevertheless, I believe it is important to say what the book is not, despite its advertising and the forward by the series editors: this is *not* a book about "how the parish, *as a system*, functions." It is not really a *systemic* approach at all, but rather the application of some important ideas of personal and relational functioning to a group setting. That is significantly different from dealing either theoretically or pragmatically with a system per se. The author appears to understand what he casually refers to as the "system" as the emotional sum of its component personal parts, rather than as an entity or organism in its own right with its own dynamics, history, and life—which would be the fundamental jumping off point of actual systems theory. In that sense, the approach taken is better described as covert individualism from a group perspective. Personal emotional reactions taken collectively, no matter how insightfully, do not a system make.

It is by no means the reviewer's intention to criticize a book for what it is not or does not intend to do. That would not be fair and this is a useful volume just for what it is. Neither is it "fair," however, for an editor or publisher to misidentify a book's subject as this one subtly has. This is particularly important since we badly need some good books for ministers and church leaders that explore congregational life from a *genuinely* systemic perspective such as can be found represented by such organizations (and their extensive publications) as the Grubb, A. K. Rice, Alban, or Tavistock Institutes. *Caveat emptor*.

J. Randall Nichols  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Savage, John. *Listening and Caring Skills in Ministry: A Guide for Pastors, Counselors, and Small Group Leaders*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. Pp. 152. \$12.95.

John S. Savage is an ordained United Methodist minister who works as a full-time consultant in leadership education and development training. He



writes in a simple conversational style, often recounting personal stories and engaging the reader directly. Having worked for twenty-six years as a pastor in local churches, he not only understands the common issues faced by pastors, but also the kinds of communication and interpersonal skills they need for effective pastoral care. In this book, Savage shares the fruit of his life work with his colleagues in ministry, particularly those who are just beginning.

I have used this book as an introductory text in a basic course in pastoral care and counseling. It is helpfully organized into three sections: basic listening skills for ministry, hearing the story, and advanced listening skills. The chapters are short and to the point. The strongest section is part one, in which Savage clearly defines, describes, and illustrates seven essential listening skills: paraphrase, productive questions, perception check, expression of feelings, fogging, negative inquiry, and behavior description. Having assigned the book early in the semester, I found myself referring to it repeatedly throughout the course (particularly in relation to students' verbatim accounts of pastoral conversations) as a point of reference and reminder. Pastors and teachers who have finely-honed listening skills may well have forgotten how essential it was to learn that the words they hear may not mean the same thing to them that they mean to the speaker, or that some questions are experienced as invasive while others have the virtue of drawing the speaker out. But such insights can come as minor revelations to beginning students. When they are integrated into the students' pastoral functioning, the quality of their pastoral conversations rises noticeably. More experienced pastors and teachers will find excellent analytical categories for thinking about these skills as well as for teaching them to others. Clues on how to build basic rapport are sprinkled throughout the text. Each chapter begins with a succinct definition of a particular skill, proceeds with vivid and relevant illustrations, and ends with a focused summary. Several of the chapters contain helpful exercises for developing the desired skill.

Part two, on "hearing the story" is an engaging discussion of what it means to listen to another's story and effectively to hear its deep structure through the salient themes and metaphors used. Savage guides pastors to perceive speakers' core emotional issues by listening to their deep metaphors carefully, suggesting that persons will unconsciously reveal their fundamental life struggles through the stories they choose to tell. He argues his point by giving examples of sermon illustrations which reveal the emotional situation of the various preachers unbeknownst to them. This section may prompt ministers to think twice about the stories they tell in public. But more to the point, it



teaches the essential skill of learning to listen for deep metaphors and pondering their meaning.

I consider part three to be the most ambitious but least satisfying part of the book. Here Savage writes about "life commandments," those beliefs which people learn in their families of origin and which drive their behavior, for the most part unconsciously. He plunges into deep theoretical waters here without adequate conceptual equipment. He tries to convey extremely complex material in too brief a space regarding the use people make of their life experiences to form certain conceptions of God. Savage seems to hold a number of psychoanalytic assumptions (such as those clearly developed in a sophisticated way by Ana Maria Rizzuto in her book, *The Birth of the Living God*), but he doesn't clarify or reflect on those assumptions. As a result, he glosses over too many difficult issues and seems to confuse psychological and theological modes of discourse. The genre of this book (a "how to," skills-building book) is not adequate to the task. One begins to lose confidence in the author as a guide through important theological issues. Not only does the section contain outright errors (where, for example, does Jesus tell us to "do everything in moderation" [p. 105]; or how is it that Savage thinks that St. Paul wrote the Gospel of Mark? [p. 138: "As Paul puts it, 'I believe; help my unbelief' (Mark 9:24)"]), but it also includes some theologically dubious claims that have not taken to heart Christian teaching on sin and death, for example: "The only limits we have on what we can do is what we believe we can do." What Savage is trying to get at here, namely, the enormous importance of our actual life experience in shaping our faith and theology, is of course a crucial issue in pastoral theology, but the section fails to provide adequate analytical tools for sorting through the conceptual issues. The book ends with a brief chapter on neurolinguistic programming and the insight it offers for promoting rapport between speaker and listener.

The subtitle of the book, "a guide for pastors, counselors and small group leaders" might raise the expectation that the book deals with group process or systemic issues. It does not. Another (minor but irritating) weakness of this book is in its incorrect word usage and grammatical errors: "dissolutionary" instead of "disillusioning," "illicit" when Savage means "elicit," "second-grade" instead of "second-class," shifts in mid-sentence from "you" to "he or she," or speaking of "metaphor" when "theme" is meant. In a book about clear communication, such mistakes are unfortunate.

I want to close, however, by accentuating the book's strengths. I intend to use it again in my introductory class. Students repeatedly commented on the importance of the insights Savage had given them. One wrote in his final

evaluation of the course: "I thought I was a good listener until I read *Listening and Caring Skills in Ministry*. I have actually implemented many of the skills the book suggests as opportunities for pastoral care have arisen. It is amazing the things you learn . . ." It is no small matter that Savage's work has had such an effect.

Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Carl, William J., Jr., ed. *Graying Gracefully: Preaching to Older Adults*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997. Pp. xi + 157. \$15.00.

In this day of the graying of the churches (and, indeed, the soon to come graying of the population as a whole as boomers reach their fifties) it is astonishing that this volume is the first to be addressed specifically to issues involved in preaching to the elderly. As a pioneer endeavor it basically accomplishes its editor's stated aim: "It is an initial word. It looks at some of the biblical and spiritual aspects, as well as at some of the pastoral concerns. It does not primarily consider the church's historical experience with or toward older adults, nor does its limited scope permit an extensive survey of the changing views of various theologies toward older adults."

The format reflects that of the Scott Lectures at Phillips Theological Seminary on the University of Tulsa Campus in which all the contributors, save Walter J. Burghardt, S. J., participated. These contributors include William J. Carl III, David G. Buttrick, Jon L. Berquist, Cynthia M. Campbell, Joseph R. Jeter, Jr., James Earl Massey, and the editor. Each contributes an essay about aging and a sermon at least somewhat related to it (except for William J. Carl III, who contributed a sermon only).

In general, the contributors show a solid grasp of some basic issues involved in aging and its vicissitudes, as well as the realistic picture of aging found in the Bible. They are sensitive to the stereotypes of aging most prevalent in contemporary culture and urge their avoidance. They seek to address, both in their essays and in their sermons, questions of central concern to the aging, such as loneliness, grief, tendencies to cling to the past in both personal identity and expectations of others, death and mortality, family relationships, and the need for vision.

Inevitably in a collection of sermons by different preachers, some of the sermons are more attractive and interestingly written than others. To my mind the sermon, "Clasping hands across the years," by Joseph R. Jeter, Jr., who teaches homiletics at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, stood out as a

model for preaching to the elderly because of its arresting style, as well as by its theme of continuity with previous generations as a means to imbue meaning in the lives of listeners whose present may lack a sense of participation.

The important question of what is really distinctive about preaching to the elderly as contrasted with preaching in general is addressed by the editor, William J. Carl, Jr., without giving a clear-cut decisive answer. "Preaching the gospel to older adults does have its unique aspects—but it should not be segregated or sentimental," he says. The unique aspects seem to pertain mainly to sermons preached in nursing home settings, in which emphases on the story form in establishing links to the familiar are even more in order than elsewhere. But otherwise, preaching to the elderly is much like preaching to multi-age congregations, except for the special thematic emphases mentioned, which need particular, but not exclusive, attention.

One theme which might have been further highlighted in this volume is the need of the elderly to experience both continuity with previous generations as well as change, discontinuity, and newness in their own lives. Indeed, at one point Carl seems to imply that any attempt to hold on to continuity is evidence of a lack of integrity. I believe rather that the elderly should balance continuity with change in some tension in order to live life to the fullest. But this is a minor quibble with a pioneer effort in a vital area.

James N. Lapsley  
Princeton Theological Seminary

English, Donald. *An Evangelical Theology of Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. Pp. 144. \$12.95.

Donald English is a Methodist minister who has twice served as president of the British Methodist Conference. Educated at London and Cambridge Universities, he taught New Testament studies at Hartley-Victoria Theological College in Manchester and currently serves as chair of the World Methodist Council. These credentials, plus his many appearances on the BBC, give him greater name-recognition in Europe than in the United States, though the Beeson Lectures in Preaching at Asbury Theological Seminary formed the basis of this book.

In the first paragraph of the introduction, English announces "this is not another 'method' book on preaching. . . . This is rather a book about why anyone would want to preach in the first place." Attention-getting aphorisms (e.g., "the trouble with Christian doctrine is that it comes in creedal state-

ments") are scattered in nearly every one of the nine chapters, which range from "God is Here: How Could You Tell?" and "Doctrine as a Rhythm for Life: Dying and Rising with Jesus" to the more mundane "Text and Context: It's Okay to Be Interesting!" Despite the author's disclaimer about method, the first half of the book is more theoretical and the last half more practical. In the chapter on text and context, for example, he makes concrete suggestions for determining and speaking to the cultural context and life experiences of the listeners. Among North American homileticsians, his Christology is reminiscent of that expressed in Richard Lischer's *A Theology of Preaching* or Paul Scott Wilson's *The Practice of Preaching*, while much of the method section calls to mind Fred Craddock's *Preaching*.

It may be, as George Hunter notes in the foreword, that "evangelical" is not the most adequate term to describe English's theology, particularly given our culture's biases concerning the word. "Classical" or "traditional Protestant" may be closer to the mark. English draws on the thought of British and North American scholars of the twentieth century: A. M. Ramsey, John Habgood, C. H. Dodd, Lesslie Newbigin, and Thomas Oden, to name a few. No mention is made, however, of any liberation, process, or feminist theologies and how they are addressed or challenged by an evangelical/classical theology of preaching. Nor is there any sustained discussion of postmodernism per se and its implications for homiletical method. In fairness to English, his chapters on "Uniformity and Variety: God's Many-Sided Grace" and "Text and Context: It's Okay to Be Interesting!" do describe the diverse experiences and worldviews today's preacher must attempt to address. In addition, while "postmodern" may be *the* current buzz-word in American homiletics, it is not as widely used everywhere else.

English writes in a lively, engaging style except when he (or his editor) uses awkward, unnatural syntax out of zeal for inclusive language. I grimaced at 'God is among God's people' and "God's people without God's presence is a contradiction in terms" in the opening paragraph. Not only does it draw attention to itself rather than the content; it works against the relational, interpersonal theology English is presenting. The final chapter, "Preaching and the Preacher," is a welcome and perhaps daring discussion of the character and spirituality of the preacher—an aspect of homiletics often overlooked in recent textbooks. The author is at his best when he offers analogies, anecdotes, and testimony, and somewhat less effective when giving structural models for unity and diversity or the "six fundamental strands in the gospel story." The book is likely to be useful for two kinds of readers. The first is the seminary student whose theological orientation is sympathetic to



English's and who wants more than a mechanistic sermon-construction manual. The second is the largely self-educated and/or lay preacher, who will benefit from the integration of what she/he has read independently with the changing cultural context to be addressed on Sunday.

Carol M. Norén

North Park Theological Seminary

McKenzie, Alyce M. *Preaching Proverbs: Wisdom for the Pulpit*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996. Pp. xxii + 170. \$15.00.

Alyce McKenzie is Visiting Lecturer in Preaching at Princeton Theological Seminary and currently serves as a consultant in preaching and worship to pastors of the Eastern and Central Pennsylvania Conferences of the United Methodist Church. In the preface, McKenzie writes that her book is "an attempt to distribute for daily use the crucial contents of a lost-and-found box, the proverbial wisdom of our biblical tradition." The goal of the volume is to demonstrate the power of proverbial wisdom for the pulpit. The book is divided into three sections with a total of nine chapters. Part I introduces proverbs as wisdom for the pulpit and argues that proverbs not only affirm traditional values but are also capable of criticizing those values. Part II describes in more detail the twofold purpose of proverbs which is either to create or subvert order. McKenzie examines this dual function in Proverbs, Qohelet, the Synoptic Gospels, and contemporary culture. Part III offers six homiletical models for preaching proverbs. Three of the models are based on proverbs that orient and three are based on proverbs that disorient.

Chapter 3 sets forth McKenzie's basic method of proverb use in the pulpit. In order to activate a proverb, the preacher must engage in a dynamic exchange between the text and contemporary culture. Three basic perspectives are needed for this interaction. First, questions must be asked about the historical-social context of the proverb. For example, is this a proverb that creates order or one that undermines it? Second, questions are asked about the theological context. For example, McKenzie appropriately argues that the key theological context for proverbs in the Book of Proverbs is that "human life is lived in the context of an inscrutable, sovereign God." Even the most mundane proverb must be interpreted in light of this perspective. Third, literary questions are asked. For example, what is the literary context of this proverb? Is it surrounded by a cluster of proverbs? What is the context in which Jesus uses a particular proverb? This methodological framework forms the basis for pressing the proverb into active duty in the pulpit. Throughout



the body of the book, McKenzie highlights this dialectic at work in the wisdom corpus itself.

The six sermon models at the conclusion of the book offer a rich variety of options for preaching proverbs. The models represent an honest effort to deal with the whole gamut of proverbial lore. McKenzie offers a number of options for structuring such sermons. For example, in a sermon on a proverb that creates order, she suggests creating a tension between a constellation of experiences in which the proverb offers guidance as opposed to another series of situations in which the proverb leads to harm. Such tension honors the nature of the proverb as a spotlight designed for a specific situation rather than a floodlight created to apply to all situations. With each of her models she includes a well-crafted sermon that embodies these principles.

With the renewed scholarly interest in wisdom literature over the past two decades, this book is a welcome sight for preachers. McKenzie's work is based on solid scholarship, which is pressed into service for the pulpit. While her scholarship is used in the service of the church, the one area where scholarship overwhelms the church is in her analysis of the sayings of Jesus in the Q document. The Q document is too speculative a construct to be of much help to the preacher.

But the strengths of this volume far outweigh any particular limitation. The volume offers a clear method that is based on sound hermeneutical and theological foundations. The models McKenzie offers as ways of preaching proverbs are substantive. These models do not skirt the difficult issues or proverbs that have heretofore largely been ignored or used as moralistic platitudes. The sermons enter into a type of casuistic reasoning at its finest. McKenzie does a masterful job of engaging in lively interaction with contemporary culture, using proverbs to evaluate the culture's values and norms. For those who are serious about engaging in active interaction with contemporary culture, this book is a must. Those who are serious about learning how to preach proverbs will find this volume indispensable.

Dave Bland

Harding University Graduate School of Religion

Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Mary through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996. Pp. xii + 269. \$25.00.

No one woman has more pervasively influenced Western culture than the Virgin Mary. From the earliest days of Christianity, devotion to her and desire to understand her role have not only driven doctrinal debates, but

inspired stories of her life, legends of her miraculous acts, literature, visual art, and music. Even in this secular age, pilgrims flock to Lourdes and Medjugorje, seeking her aid. She has been featured recently in popular weekly magazines and the Pope has been petitioned to name her "co-redeemer." Given current interest in Mary, Jaroslav Pelikan has written a timely and much-needed book. In *Mary through the Centuries*, which he sees as a companion volume to his earlier *Jesus through the Centuries*, Pelikan traces the cultural response to Mary, from her introduction in Scripture, through the height of the cult of the Virgin in the Middle Ages, to the Reformation reaction to that cult, into contemporary manifestations of faith in the Virgin.

Pelikan makes it clear from his introduction that he intends to provide more than an historical survey of Marian thought. He wants to understand her place in Western culture, stating hers is "the female name that has been pronounced most often in the Western world." He goes on to assert "The Virgin Mary has been more of an inspiration to more people than any other woman who ever lived." Such a monolithic presence inspires strong emotional reactions, both positive and negative. Whether they like her or not, Westerners, particularly Western women, feel the significant influence of Mary.

In his analysis, Pelikan presents us with the Virgin as a complex historical and cultural phenomenon. He begins by examining Mary as she appears in Scripture and then moves out to show how she accrued more complex theological functions and aesthetic manifestations, the simple peasant girl of Nazareth evolving into the Queen of Heaven. As he travels through history, he identifies attributes assigned to Mary that most clearly indicate her role in a given time, augmenting his extensive knowledge of doctrinal history with discussions of visual art, literature, and music. Thus, we have chapters exploring, for example, Mary as the Daughter of Zion, the Second Eve, the *Mater Dolorosa*, and the Woman Clothed with the Sun. In one of the book's most significant chapters, Pelikan devotes his attention to Mary as the Heroine of the Qur'an, a chapter that outlines Mary's role in Islam through a detailed commentary on surah 19, and presents Mary as a necessary bridge between two religious cultures.

If this book has a flaw, it is that the richness of the text is not matched in the endnotes. Although Pelikan directs his book to a wide audience, not necessarily academic, he could have provided fuller annotations for those who wish to know more about the wide-ranging references he makes to other texts and objects. I found myself frequently turning to the back of the book for more information, only to be disappointed.

Pelikan brings a long life of study, teaching, and writing to *Mary through the Centuries*. He eschews the love-to-hate-her attitude and the need to provide a psychoanalytical rationalization for Marian devotion, both of which characterize much recent work on Mary. Instead, he remains true to his objective, to provide a balanced examination of this potent cultural icon in a learned yet lively and readable text.

Laurel Broughton  
University of Vermont

Robert, Dana L. *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice*. Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996. Pp. 444. \$30.00.

Since the 1968 publication of R. Pierce Beaver's *All Loves Excelling: American Protestant Women in Mission*, more than twenty books recounting and analyzing women's role in Christian mission have been published, in addition to an ongoing stream of individual missionary biographies. This new volume by Dana Robert, Professor of Mission at the Boston University School of Theology, is a comprehensive, thoroughly researched, and captivatingly written history of Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Roman Catholic women missionaries from 1792 to 1992. It is a valuable addition to the works currently available.

Beginning with a penetrating analysis of Protestant women as "missionary wives"—the earliest female missionary model—Robert proceeds to compare the impact of a few of these women, observing that some came to be regarded as heroines, some martyrs, and some "failures." The candor of her discussion in this section, as well as in others, may be disconcerting to readers who nurture romantic or uninformed views of missionaries. But I found it accurate and reassuring. The church is never served by fiction masked as history.

Her comparison of the pioneer missionary wives in Burma with those in Hawaii is particularly perceptive because their contrasting approaches resulted in two quite different theories regarding what the female missionary task should be. She rightly concludes that the effectiveness of these early women missionaries—as well as their happiness and sense of fulfillment—depended not solely on their ability. It depended more on the degree of freedom they felt they had to *be missionaries*, that is, to learn the language, identify with the people, and engage in work other than homemaking and parenting.

The second part of the book is a history and evaluation of three somewhat distinct missionary groups—Methodist Episcopal women, the ecumenical

Woman's Missionary Movement, and representative women sent out by some of the earliest independent Evangelical, Holiness, and Pentecostal churches. The account of Minnie Abrams' incredible and widespread influence, for example, is merely one indication of the extensive network some of these female missionaries developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, long before the time of faxes and e-mail. Abrams' witness helps to explain the sudden outburst of Pentecostal fervor in Chile during the first decade of this century and the subsequent growth of Pentecostalism throughout Latin America.

The final section of the book is a skillful condensation of the complex and almost unmanageable history of Roman Catholic women in domestic and international missions. Especially helpful to Protestant readers, I believe, will be the story of "the emergence of missionary sisters." Though sympathetic, Robert objectively criticizes their theology, their stated motivation, their commitment, and their contribution, noting that officially these missionary women continue to be regarded as "auxiliaries" in a completely male-dominated church and mission structure. Some may question Robert's suggestion that certain of these female missionary orders have moved beyond being simple assistants to being missionaries in their own right. But those who know these remarkable women are aware that despite the Pope's refusal to permit their ordination, religious women today are serving as *de facto* priests in many of the world's most isolated and dangerous places.

Some of the more than three-hundred women included in this volume are well-known, but most of them are not. Their sheer numbers as well as the extent and effectiveness of their work will, I hope, encourage younger scholars to continue research in this vast and fertile field of study which until now has barely been tapped. Meanwhile, seasoned and younger scholars—as well as others interested in the work of women in Christian missions—can be grateful to Dana Robert for her invigorating, forthright, and informative volume.

Alan Neely  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Chesebrough, David B. *Clergy Dissent in the Old South, 1830–1865*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996. Pp. xiii + 136. \$29.95.

What role did the churches and ministers play in the Old South? The standard answer is that the clergy shored up support for slavery in the thirty years before the Civil War, thumped the drums for secession in the 1860s, and



in general helped to quash contrary views. As an historical generalization, David Chesebrough does not dispute this portrayal. He insists, however, that the consensus for slavery and for the Confederacy was never complete. Though a decided minority, dissenting clergy did exist. Chesebrough offers a series of fascinating portraits of these ministers who dared to stand against the tide.

The dissenting clergy were a diverse lot. For example, John Fee, son of a Kentucky slave-holding family, converted to abolitionism in the 1840s while a student at Lane Seminary in Cincinnati. Disowned by his father, Fee founded antislavery churches and a school at Berea in 1853. Somehow he managed to survive threats until he made a widely misrepresented remark following John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry in 1859. "We want more John Browns," he declared while visiting Henry Ward Beecher's church in Brooklyn, "not in manner of action, but in consecration; not to go with carnal weapons but spiritual." The press failed to report the qualification and popular outrage forced Fee to leave Kentucky; but by the middle of the Civil War he was back again at his church and school work. Quite unlike Fee was William G. ("Parson") Brownlow, a Tennessee Methodist minister who dabbled in journalism and politics as well as preaching. Although Brownlow initially defended slavery and wanted no truck with abolitionism, he remained loyal to the federal government after Tennessee's secession in 1861. Temporarily imprisoned for writing pro-Union editorials, he was eventually expelled from the state. He returned with the Yankee army in 1863 and two years later became governor. In Columbus, Mississippi, James Lyon managed to hold onto his church and became moderator of the Southern Presbyterian denomination in 1863 even as he discreetly expressed serious reservations about the Confederate cause. These are only a few of the many instances cited by Chesebrough to make the case that Southern churches contained a creative minority.

Evaluated as a series of vignettes about clergy dissent in the Old South, Chesebrough's book is an entertaining and good "read." The book is also valuable in that it is the first volume of its kind. To be sure, there are works on the dissenting tradition in the old South—for example, Carl Degler's *The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century* (1974); but Degler casts his net more broadly and Chesebrough is the first to focus explicitly and exclusively upon the subject of clergy dissent. The book is not without problems, however. It is more reportorial than analytic, and no individual receives in-depth examination. As the author rushes from one figure to the next, one breezy (and brief) account gives way to another. But for those who



know little about that other South where ministers dissented from slavery and secession, Chesebrough's book will provide a very readable and informative introduction to the subject.

James H. Moorhead  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Cross, F. L., and E. A. Livingstone, eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pp. xxxvii + 1786. \$125.00.

The first two editions (1957 and 1974) of *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (ODCC) firmly established it as the best one-volume English reference work in church history. This third edition, still in the good hands of E. A. Livingstone, strengthens that position with updated entries and bibliographies as well as many new entries. Now almost 1800 pages, the expanded and updated version promotes more global inclusivity and better coverage of liberation theology and especially feminist theology. See, for example, the new entry on "Women, Ordination of."

As before, the ODCC covers some biblical material, practically everything in church history and liturgy, and many doctrinal and ecumenical subjects. It has the expected Oxford strengths in patristics, liturgy, and English church history, and has overcome some earlier neglect of the continental Reformation. The entries are models both of brevity and clarity in their layout and content and also of comprehensiveness in bibliography for further reading.

Since countless scholars and reference librarians have had innumerable occasions to appreciate Editor Livingstone for her labors, it is a nice touch that she here thanks them for their various contributions to this volume, including, among many, Bruce Metzger and Speer Library's own Kate Skrebutenas.

Already indispensable, the new ODCC may be the best one-volume reference tool in English, not just for church history, but for Christianity in general, although other tools are certainly needed for biblical studies and ethics. Even in the age of CD-ROMs, a handy and comprehensive reference tool like this is an excellent lifetime investment for everyone professionally interested in Christianity, especially those who do not have the second edition. Although the list price is steep, it is well worth it, and discounts do occur through special distributors like the Seminary's own bookstore.

Paul Rorem  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Krueger, David, with Donald W. Shriver, Jr., and Laura L. Nash. *The Business Corporation and Productive Justice*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997. Pp. 157. \$16.95.

This is the third volume of "Studies in Christian Ethics and Economic Life," edited by Max Stackhouse. Each book's "apologetic dialogue" includes an introductory essay exploring some challenge to Christian ethical thought brought about by the globalization of economic life and two or more critical reflections by ethicists of a different persuasion from that of the lead author.

David Krueger argues in this volume that the confluence of global trends—the strengthening of market-based institutions, the explosion of new technologies, the liberalization of international trade and payments, and the weakening of national governments—is forcing Christian ethics to reevaluate its suspicions about modern business corporations. He proposes a more positive attitude: a "transformative ethic of responsibility" that helps Christians to regard economic life generally and business corporations in particular as essential to the development of a good society.

This ethic assumes market-oriented institutional arrangements are "divinely sanctioned" as part of the way society rightly organizes its life together. The problem is that the individuals and institutions that weave the fabric of business organization today inadequately display the personal qualities and institutional relationships required to contribute fully to the common good. A transformative ethic could set this right, Krueger claims, if corporate business would seek a broader purpose than making profits and creating wealth—a purpose including "productive justice"—and if Christians would contribute within businesses to their regeneration and transformation.

The markers of productive justice include individual habits like honesty, respect for others, and hard work, as well as values such as teamwork and trust. Krueger believes productive justice also requires corporations to see that products are beneficial and not harmful, human rights are respected, governments and voluntary groups that countervail corporate power are not diminished, and environmental sustainability is promoted.

Krueger admits there are no easy ways to achieve productive justice in a globalizing economy, although he believes some combination of internal corporate reform and external regulation will be required. He favors better "stakeholder" representation on corporate boards and more internal accountability. Because common problems will increasingly intrude across jurisdictional boundaries, corporations will have to collaborate more with governments and other social groups in the future.

Donald Shriver and Laura Nash provide the critical assessment of Krueger's work in this volume. Both regard it as empirically naive, particularly so because it ignores the plight of the world's poor. To be sure, the world economy is growing; but it also is generating ever larger concentrations of power and wider disparities of income. Indeed, research released after this book went to press indicates that the gap between rich and poor has widened recently not only in fully developed economies like the U.S., but also in a large number of Latin American and Asian nations (see Jeffrey G. Williamson, "Globalization and Inequality: Past and Present," *World Bank Research Observer* 12 [1997] 121).

Shriver and Nash also question whether generalized normative expressions like Krueger's move us toward the common good. When one applies such principles to specific business practices within a capitalistic system, one quickly discovers complications and conflicts among principles that make achievements ambiguous, for example, when deciding whether to do business in South Africa during apartheid.

*The Business Corporation and Productive Justice* is a useful introduction to the shift of focus in Christian ethics toward issues of productive justice. It helpfully juxtaposes an apologist for capitalism (Krueger) with the views of two who are skeptical of capitalism (Shriver and Nash). Yet neither side has articulated well the main consequences of the globalization process for the human community: the exaggeration of differences between those with the education, skills, and mobility to flourish in an unfettered world market, and those without; the widening of differences between political jurisdictions over domestic policy priorities; and the shriveling of capacity by governments to ameliorate the harm globalization inflicts on the "losers." At the very time increased integration has heightened the need for social insurance to protect the people who remain internationally immobile, governments find themselves less and less able to furnish the safety nets needed to preserve community stability. Is distributional justice not then an *essential* part of productive justice?

Gordon K. Douglass  
Princeton, NJ

Wilbanks, Dana W. *Re-Creating America: The Ethics of U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy in a Christian Perspective*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. Pp. 231. \$18.95.

This aptly-titled book undertakes two tasks, distinguishable but closely related. First, it explores one of the knottiest problems of social ethics: the

immigration policies of the United States. In the process it shows how little attention Christian thought and action have given to an issue so important and urgent. Second, the book deals perceptively with the perennial problem: how to relate Christian ethics, in all its radical distinctiveness, to social policies in a pluralistic society where many factors, religious and secular, shape policy.

Dana Wilbanks, Professor of Christian Ethics at the Iliff School of Theology, brings a sharp mind and a profound ethical concern to both issues. He is immersed in his subject, both from participation in international investigations of it and from experience in church-based efforts to provide sanctuary to immigrants whom the government wants to deport.

On the first issue, Wilbanks points out the divided conscience of the American public. We are a nation of immigrants and we presently receive "almost as many legal immigrants each year as the combined total of all other countries." Yet our policies, distorted by nativism and self-protection, have been shamefully cruel to refugees fleeing oppression. Wilbanks advocates more generous policies. He gives his adversaries a hearing, showing why their arguments have some persuasiveness, but presents his own arguments forcefully.

On the second issue, Wilbanks advocates a distinctive Christian ethic, directed initially to the church; yet he wants to make a difference in public policy. Here he enters into conversation with such ethicists as Stanley Hauerwas, Max Stackhouse, Joseph Allen, and representatives of Roman Catholic ethics.

As a Christian, Wilbanks advocates an ethic rooted in the biblical narrative, with its emphasis on hospitality to the stranger and sojourner. One might ask whether he neglects some of its harsher chords; for example, the permission to enslave "resident aliens" but not "fellow Israelites" (Leviticus 25). But he shows how the biblical ethic, in the interpretations that have become normative for Judaism and Christianity, requires truly radical openness to the needs of others, whether kin or strangers. This ethic might lead to the advocacy of open national borders with no restrictions on immigration.

But a prudential realism moderates this radicalism. Wilbanks can reject an ethic as "too perfectionistic." So he formulates the more cautious question: "What kinds of would-be migrants should be given priority within the finite constraints of emotional, financial, and social resources of the settled population?" Here he asks for a "generous, yet selective" policy. And he offers guidelines for selectivity: priority to refugees, especially those most threatened by oppression and danger, to the poor, to those geographically closest to us, to those whose present danger is a result of our own military or economic



acts. And he calls for elimination of the frequent biases introduced by racial prejudice or military and ideological pressures.

Wilbanks acknowledges the tension within his ethic. He wants Christians to "relativize the authority of the state and qualify the claims of the national community," yet "participate in shaping the character of the national community." He finds utilitarian ethics inadequate but knows he cannot ignore it. He wants "to draw more tautly the tensions between membership in the national society and faithfulness to God," yet also tries to take account of "strategy" in choosing objectives. This is a difficult act to pull off but I agree with Wilbanks that it is better than pure perfectionism or utilitarianism.

What is the possibility that Wilbanks's policies will be accepted? Such able and public-spirited citizens as Theodore Hesburgh and the late Barbara Jordan have tried to devise governmental policies that are both ethical and practical. They did not have notable success. But we are better for their efforts and we should maintain them. This book can help us do so.

Roger L. Shinn

Union Theological Seminary, New York

O'Donovan, Oliver. *The Desire of Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. xii + 304. \$59.95.

This is a monumental and provocative study. Through disciplined biblical and historical analysis, O'Donovan casts the Christian message as the history of God's saving, judging, and re-creative reign over the whole of human society and politics. Stanley Hauerwas, on the jacket, calls it a "defense of Christendom as a witness to the power of the Gospel." It is that but still more. The author is determined to dismantle all the dichotomies in our minds: servanthood-power, person-society, religion-secularity, church-state, faith-culture, unity-diversity, and even eternity-time, to make way for the one controlling reality that unfolds in the events of Scripture and of the church in mission to the world.

This reality, says O'Donovan, is fundamentally political. YHWH reigns, not with a *potentia absoluta* but a *potentia ordinata* "which works within the covenant that is established through creation." It has a threefold form: (1) saving victory expressed in the subjection of Israel's enemies, in Christ's advent, healing ministry, and proclamation of God's reign, and in the gathering of the nations into the church; (2) judgment, *on* Israel, then on the nations, *for* the crowds, the poor, and the sinners in all ranks of life, expressed



in forgiveness and justification, in renewal and extension of the covenant, through the passion of Christ and the witness of the suffering church in conflict with the powers that Christ has overcome; and, (3) establishment of the law as an inward orientation of the community toward mercy and peace, expressed in an evangelical morality in which Christ through the church recovers and extends the order of creation and "discerns the inner logic of the dawning kingdom of God."

It is this divine providence, this work of God, that gives humanity its socio-political identity. "Without the act of worship political authority is unbelievable." Secular power and culture live in and are legitimated by the penumbra of divine political action subjecting the powers of the world to Christ and renewing human society. Christendom, says O'Donovan, has been at heart a witness to this reality. It is a believing response to the Christ event which establishes human politics and culture in their true secularity. It is therefore a response to the mission of the church and an expression of mission. Government is called to witness to the coming kingdom of God by its own faithful exercise of the one political function left to it, that of the provisional, secular establishment of justice. The church is to challenge government in the name of the ruling Christ to faithful authentic political discipleship, to help it discern the powers of anti-Christ, and to bear witness (*martyria*) against them. They are involved in "a mutual service between the two authorities, predicated on the difference and the balance of their roles."

Christendom was undermined, O'Donovan says, when it became an institutional structure, rather than service to the world transforming work of God. Nevertheless, the relative stability of liberal political institutions in modern society—freedom, justice, forgiveness, and recognition of the rights of others in peaceful cohabitation—depend in fact on a lingering Christian social consensus. It is a threatened stability. The nonestablishment clause of the U.S. Constitution strikes directly at evangelical political obedience. (O'Donovan, Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at Oxford, is not impressed by American icons.) An acephalous view of society, as if its order reflected only the will and power of the people, invites arbitrary justice and tyranny by the powerful. Economic "natural necessity" justifies exploitation both of the poor and of God's creation for the profit of a few. Mass communication—"totalized speech"—undermines open dialogue with one another. Above all, and with this O'Donovan begins his book, a culture of suspicion is forming. Where there is no recognized authority beyond the human, reason becomes ideological persuasion in the service of those with interests and power. Mutual trust disappears. We must recover, he believes,

the confidence and hope for all society that has been revealed to the world in the reign of God, the victory of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit toward the coming of the kingdom. The world must be challenged again with this gospel.

This summary does not begin to do justice to the subtlety of O'Donovan's exegesis or the masterful way he weaves the strands of church history into his argument. Those who would take issue with him, and they will be many, must do so page by page, scripture by scripture, and source by historical source. Where then, does the dialogue begin? Let this reviewer suggest just a few points for the agenda.

First, O'Donovan, to his credit, shares with Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and others, an uncompromising opposition to all ontological dualisms. Reality is whole and is revealed in the historical action of the triune God. Gone is the split between reason and revelation, between word and act, between what is and what ought to be. O'Donovan is not a Reformation theologian. His English worldview is more attuned to the early and medieval church. He seems not to understand Luther or Barth even when he cites them. Still, within establishment Anglicanism, this is radical theology. It provokes and invites response from those of other traditions.

Second, this book performs the great service of rescuing the gospel from individual experience and private salvation. Its message is about the social and political work of God in the world, about the conquest of the powers of this age, about the victory of Christ and the renewal of creation, to which the church bears witness. The personal drama of the sinner justified by grace is set in this context where it belongs. The corrective is needed.

Third, the author is nevertheless an idealist about the church and therefore about the Christian society inspired by it. He touches lightly on the way a church may lose its prophetic missionary calling by claiming to be a sacred institution wherein God's saving work is fulfilled. But this *is* the heresy of Christendom and the drama of Christian history. Only as it is continually judged and reformed by the word of God and the presence of Christ in its midst, is the church a faithful witness. The culture of suspicion which O'Donovan finds so disturbing is all-too understandable in reaction to the church's failure to confront the cultures it has permeated with the challenge and promise of the gospel. The author is right in warning that the crumbling liberal humanism underlying our culture and politics today depends on a relation to God which it does not acknowledge. But he misses the drama of secular prophecy expressed in the devastating social critique of Karl Marx and his revolutionary followers. Therefore he does not participate in the renewal

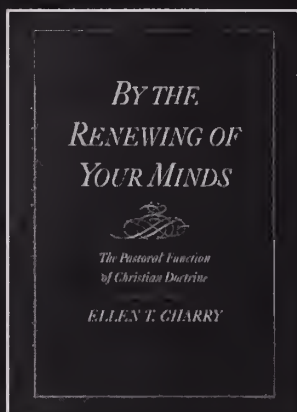
of both church and theology in the twentieth century, purged and reformed by that encounter.

Fourth, more work needs to be done, along the lines which the book projects, on the faithful, witnessing secularity of those called to establish justice in the public realm. Here again more realism is called for about the powers and interests at work in the political sphere, including those of Christians. How does the justification of the sinner by grace alone (a concept the author implies but does not use) operate to humanize social structures and combat human exploitation?

In sum, the author has presented us with a substantive statement of the postmodern political meaning of the Christian faith. The book should be read. Then the dialogue should begin.

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